Kecak

The Vocal Chant of Bali

I W[illegible] Dibia

students and faculties of the Indonesian State College of the Arts, Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Denpasar, and to others who are interested in the perfoming arts of Bali.

This book is result of long years of exposure to the art form, through both direct and indirect participation, and observation on the development of Kecak. I have seen and been interested in Kecak since the 1960, and I began to perform in Kecak in 1971 in my home village of Singapadu. Later I produced a new version of Kecak using students of the local Secondary High School. Since then I have been involved in various Kecak productions in Bali, in other cities in Indonesia, and overseas.

The impetus of this book has been my Kecak production at the University of Hawaii at Manoa (UHM). During my two months of residence at UHM, from early October to mid December 1995, I taught Balinese dance and vocal chant at the Departement of Theatre and Dance.

It is hope that this concise account of Balinese performing arts will give the reader a deeper understanding of the uniqueness and the artistic beauty of Kecak.

July 15, 1996

I Wayan Dibia
Denpasar, Bali

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I Wayan Dibia
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INTRODUCTION

Although the Balinese sometimes perform Kecak for various socio-religious events, Kecak has become one of Bali's most popular performing arts for tourists. Kecak, frequently called the "Monkey Dance" by Westerners, has become a 'must see' entertainment for both foreign and domestic visitors in Bali. Charmed by the artistic beauty of Kecak, and impressed by its dramatic intensity, many have featured this art form in countless postcards, books, and other publications on Bali. Despite all of its popularity, what makes Kecak a unique dramatic form all too often remains unknown to those who attend a performance.

Kecak is a secular or **balih-balihan** art form that embodies the spirit and esthetic elements of the ancient and modern traditions of Bali. Kecak integrates both dance and drama, but ultimately the artistic beauty of Kecak lies in its intricate vocal chanting. The complex and multi-layered sounds of "cak cak cak" chanted by the chorus into various rhythmic patterns is at once the essence and soul of Kecak.

lies.
layered

Cultural Setting

In order to fully appreciate the traditions that lend character and style to a Kecak performance, one must first observe Kecak in relation to some of the myriad traditional dramatic forms in Bali. This is important as it will demonstrate how Kecak dynamically oscillates between ancient and modern traditional Balinese culture.

In Bali, perhaps more than any other place in the world, old and modern traditions exist side-by-side. The Balinese embrace both while never strictly separating one from the other. In many ways the people of Bali have used their old traditions to create modern cultural forms. Conversely, they have also transplanted elements from modern forms into ancient traditions to give them new life and vitality. The conscious exchange of elements from their rich cultural background has been an effective way for the Balinese to cope with modernization without losing their respect for traditional culture.

The interaction between old and new is manifested in almost all major Balinese art forms. On the island of Bali today one may encounter various form of music, dance, and drama, which could date back hundreds of years before the arrival of Hinduism or be new works from the art academy. These art forms continually interact and influence one another. It is not uncommon, for example, for a secular art, like Kecak, to utilize elements from sacred and religious or **wali** arts, or a sacred art to incorporate more contemporary elements.

Among the major dramatic forms in Bali, Kecak, perhaps more than any other, the best art form for demonstrating the intimate interaction of different elements of Balinese cultural traditions. Even though Kecak was developed in the 1930s primarily as a tourist performance, it continues to cultivate the spirit of the ancient cultural forms of Bali.

Kecak is onomatopoetically named after the sound "cak" or "cek" which is continuesly chanted throughout the performance. In any attempt to understand Kecak, some have suggested that this sound "cak" actually has a special meaning and significance in the performance. According to one theory, the sound is derived from Kicaka, the heroic prime minister of the Wirata kingdom in the epic tale of Mahabhrata. This theory claims that because Kicaka was so beloved by the king and respected within the kingdom that they shouted his name after a victory in battle. After some time the salutation, "Kicaka, Kicaka, Kicaka," becomes "cak, cak, cak."

The most widely accepted interpretation of the sound "cak" is that it is an imitation of a house lizard or gecko. The name of this lizard in Bali is "cecak," which is just like the little sound "cek, cek, cek" it makes. Many Balinese believe that the house lizard is a messenger for bringing good fortune. The sacred Kecak chorus used for trance performance is normally held in holy temples. It may be that the imitation of the house lizard sound was intended to invoke more good fortune from the gods residing in the temple.

cecak

Most likely the sound "cak" has neither to do with heroes or house lizard, but is in fact a purely manmade sound

invoke
residing

interlock

gamelan suara

with no meaning at all. Kecak, as it is typically described, is a form of "gamelan suara" or voice orchestra. Chorus members frequently enrich their chanting with melodic phrases and rhythmic patterns borrowed from the traditional Balinese orchestra, the gamelan. The sharp short sound of "cak" makes it easier for the chorus members to interlock their voices and recreate the rhythmic effect of a gamelan orchestra.

Important to note is that the terms Kecak is also used in Balinese folk type of dance known as **Janger**. Utilizing different kind of songs, which are mostly sung in group, this dance is normally performed by at least twenty male and female dancers. The dancers are divided into two groups: the female group is called **janger** and its counter part is **kecaks**.

Kecak di bagi 2 ⇒ Ritual (non dramatic.K)
secular (Dramatic.K)

Based on its performance context and content, Kecak can be broadly identified as two different types: the ritual (non-dramatic) Kecak, and secular (dramatic) Kecak. The older ritual Kecak is used to accompany **Sanghyang** trance dance. In a **Sanghyang** ritual the Kecak chorus members chant to accompany the tranced dancers. In the secular Kecak performance the vocal chanting is used to accompany, underscore, and embellish dramatic performances. In this secular tradition the Kecak serves no other function than to entertain the audience with elaborate musical patterns. It is important to know that the dramatic Kecak is based on the ancient ritual form of Kecak but does not violate any of its original sacred elements by being performed outside a temple ceremony. This is because the secular Kecak mainly utilizes the theatrical or musical elements of the ritual Kecak.

As mentioned before, the roots of Kecak lies in the sacred **Sanghyang** dances. While there are dozens of different kinds of **Sanghyang** dances that can be found in Bali, the two most prominent are the horse trance dance **Sanghyang Jaran** and the celestial nymph trance dance **Sanghyang Dedari**. During the performance of these **Sanghyang** dances one might expect to see Kecak used as the musical accompaniment. The Kecak chorus is made up of a group of men who alternate their chanting with the sacred song of woman's chorus. Shortly after going into trance, the dancers are carried to a designated area to dance. After the dance portion of the ritual performance there is first a blessing of the participants, which is followed by a spiritual cleansing of the whole village. For the villagers, taking part in Kecak at a **Sanghyang** performance is a religious obligation called **ngayah** that requires their participation. The Kecak chorus in a **Sanghyang** performance is more significantly a ritual rather than a skillful artistic expression.

Ritual **Sanghyang** performances with Kecak can still be found in the South Central districts of Gianyar and Badung. For centuries **Sanghyang** dances in these areas have continued to be staged as an exorcism of evil spirits that cause pestilence in a village. The horse trance dance **Sanghyang Jaran** from the villages of Sedang and Banjar Bun of Badung District, and the celestial nymph trance dance **Sanghyang Dedari** of Camenggon village of Gianyar, are two living examples of trance performance with Kecak, which, however rare and elementary, have a very important role in the spiritual lives of the people.

Unlike ritual Kecak that is performed for special occasions in specific places, the dramatic Kecak that tells the story of Ramayana can be found all over the island of Bali. The 1993 All Bali Kecak Competition and the recent 1995 All Bali Kecak Festival (just for high school students) clearly demonstrates the great popular appeal of Kecak in all nine districts of Bali. The largest and most active population of Kecak groups can be found in the Districts of Gianyar and Badung.

The Origin of Kecak

There is no record of the origin of ritual Kecak, and up until now no one knows exactly how Kecak came about, or when it was integrated into the trance **Sanghyang** dances. However, many believe that Kecak was a relatively recent invention to **Sanghyang** which was traditionally accompanied by chorus of males and females.

A master artist of Bona village of Gianyar I Made Sija once said that in his home village Kecak was created before the Dutch occupation. At that time, Bona and the surrounding villages were attacked by a destructive epidemic that caused countless deaths. When once the villagers conducted a prayer in the local temple in order to stop the epidemic, a **Sanghyang** medium went into trance and passed a holy message to the congregation that the deities residing in the temple wished to have a form of music to dance. Because no bronze music was allowed, the villagers spontaneously created vocal music and chanting. Some played

vocal
cak

I II

melody, some played ryhthmic patterns imitating that of **reyong** and **cengceng** of the gamelan music to enrich the melody. The end result of this vocal music was a primitive musical form which was then known as Cak or Kecak.

In relation to the ritual **Sanghyang** dance, Kecak serves almost the same function as the chorus, that is as musical accompaniment. Due to its affiliation to **Sanghyang** dances, Kecak gains its ritual nature. It is in this regard Kecak becomes a ritual form (ritual Kecak).

The secular Kecak emerged around the third decade of the century. There are two different versions of the creation of secular Kecak. The first states that the secular Kecak was originally created in the Bedulu village of Gianyar, through the joint effort of the German born artist Walter Spies and the people of Bedulu. The second version states that secular Kecak was developed in Bona, Gianyar, through the efforts of I Gusti Lanang Oka and I Nengah Mudarya.

In the 1930s Walter Spies was inspired by the emotional and dramatic intensity of the ritual Kecak chorus he saw in a local performance of **Sanghyang Dedari**. In 1932, Spies was a consultant for a German film company producing a movie in Bali called *Die Isle der Damonen* or **The Island of Demons.** This new form was designed so that it would be both brief and visually exciting for the film. Spies did this by suggesting the Balinese take the chorus of the **Sanghyang** and add scenes from the popular Ramayana epic. The male chorus, wearing only the loincloth, move their body in unison while chanting "cak cak cak" in the traditional rhythm patterns. Most of the time the chorus sat on the ground in three or four concentric circles. According to one performer, I Wayan Limbak, who still remembers this production, the story they performed was **Karebut Kumbakarna** or **The Death of Kumbakarna** and he was chosen to play the leading part as Kumbakarna. Some also believe that the American choreographer, Katherine Mershon, who was in Bali at the time, also helped to create this new dramatic form. Spies, however, declared that this newly created Kecak was purely a Balinese inspiration.

The second version of the creation of Kecak Ramayana states that about the same time as Walter Spies, I Gusti Lanang Oka of Bona Gianyar and I Nengah Mudarya created Kecak Ramayana by blending the vocal music (Kecak) of the ritual **Sanghyang** with the Ramayana epic. Mudarya, who had just moved South to the village of Bona (Gianyar), from North Bali (Buleleng), also used his knowledge of gamelan style from Singaraja to enrich the music of this newly created art form. The first performance enacted the [now popular] episode of **"The Abduction of Sita" or Kapandung Dewi Sita.**

Evidences suggest that Mudarya was instrumental in making tke Kecak Ramayana of Bona known to the outsiders. However, several sources suggest that dramatic Kecak was first created in Bedulu and only later was developed in the village of Bona. Most experts in Bali agree that I Gusti Lanang Oka, Mudarya, and the people of Bona had a major role in the development of the dramatic Kecak. Not only did they refine the formal structure of Kecak, they also established the standard episode of **"The Abduction of Sita."** Up until the 1960s Bona was the only village that actively performed Kecak for tourists. There after many Kecak teachers from Bona established Kecak troupes all over Bali. Due to their dedication to the development of Kecak, Bona deserves to be called "the village of Kecak" and I Gusti Lanang Oka and I Nengah Mudarya "the Fathers of Kecak Ramayana."

From examining Kecak's cultural setting and historical background, it is clear that Kecak is a performing art that integrates elements from both ancient and modern Balinese traditions. Although Kecak is a form of secular art, it utilizes elements from sacred religious ceremonies. It is also true that Kecak is primarily a form of vocal chanting more than a dance drama. The vocal music is the great strength of this art form, while the dance drama is a later insertion that only very recently has been given more attention.

PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS

A Kecak performance integrates vocal chanting, dance, and storytelling that are enriched by the costumes, make-up, and lighting. The vocal music is entirely produced by the chorus while the dance pantomime is performed by the actor-dancers. Of all of these elements, the vocal music is the most essential to the Kecak performance. This is why one may refer to Kecak as a musical-drama.

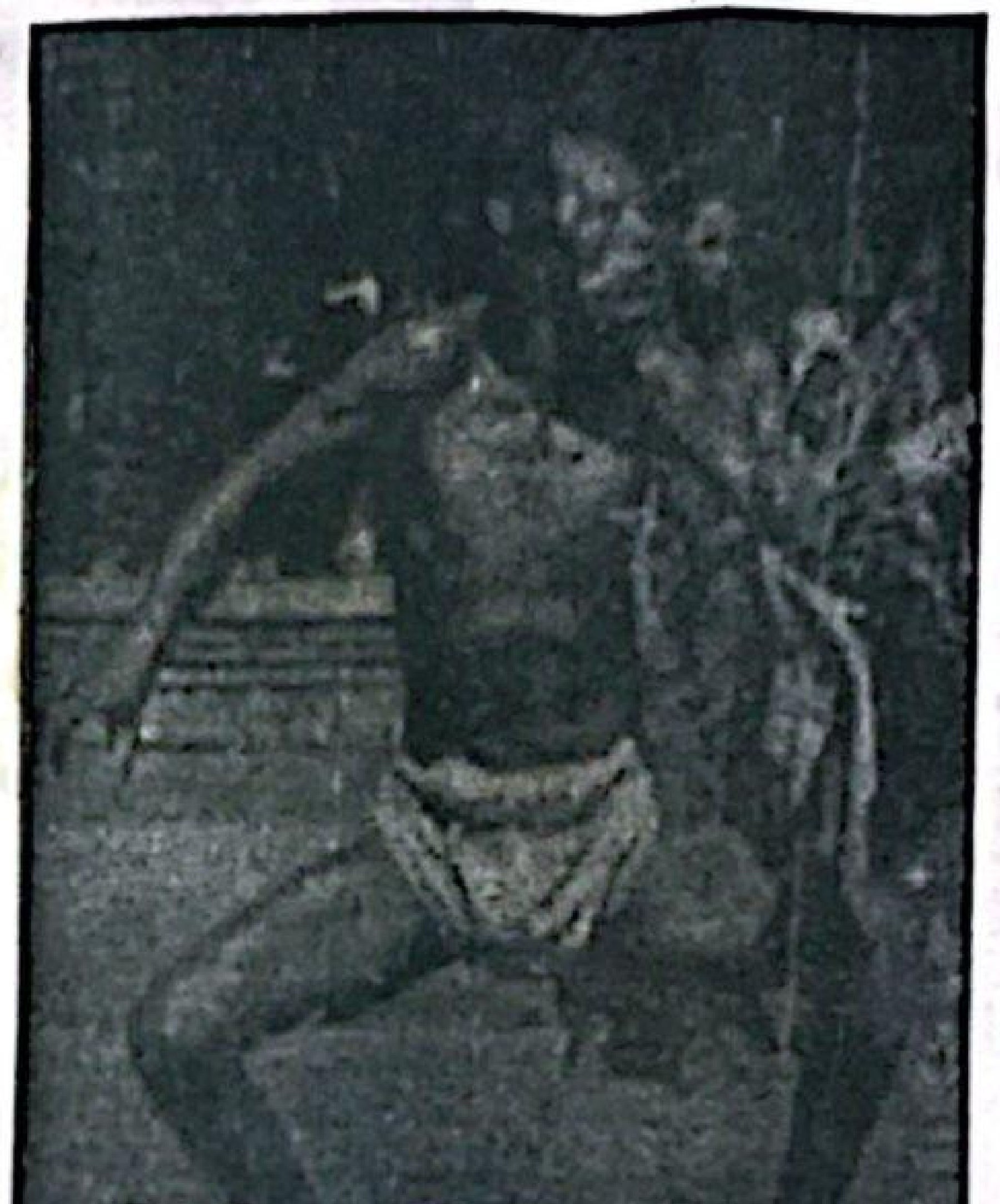
Vocal Music

5 tone scales

The vocal music used in Kecak is a mixture of irregular and regular vocal forms that use two five tone scales, **pelog** and **slendro**. The irregular vocal forms, typically sung as only one voice (monophonic), are characterized by the practice of irregular phrasing in the singing along with sounds that imitate expressive voices and nature (wind, animals, birds). The regular vocal forms that make up most of the vocal chanting use even beat rhythms based on short repeated patterns or ostinati. The regular melodic chanting patterns can either be the two-beat form **batel**, the four-beat form **bapang**, or the eight beat forms **gilak**.

wind - angin
animal - binatang
Birds [illegible] burung [illegible]

Utilizing both the regular and irregular vocal forms the music serves two primary functions: first, as a vocal interlude or **gending pangalang** between scenes: and second, as accompaniment to the scene, supporting the dramatic narrative. Vocal interludes can stand alone at the beginning of the performance or between scenes in order to establish the dramatic mood. Most of the vocal music in Kecak is intended to support the narrative action in the performance.

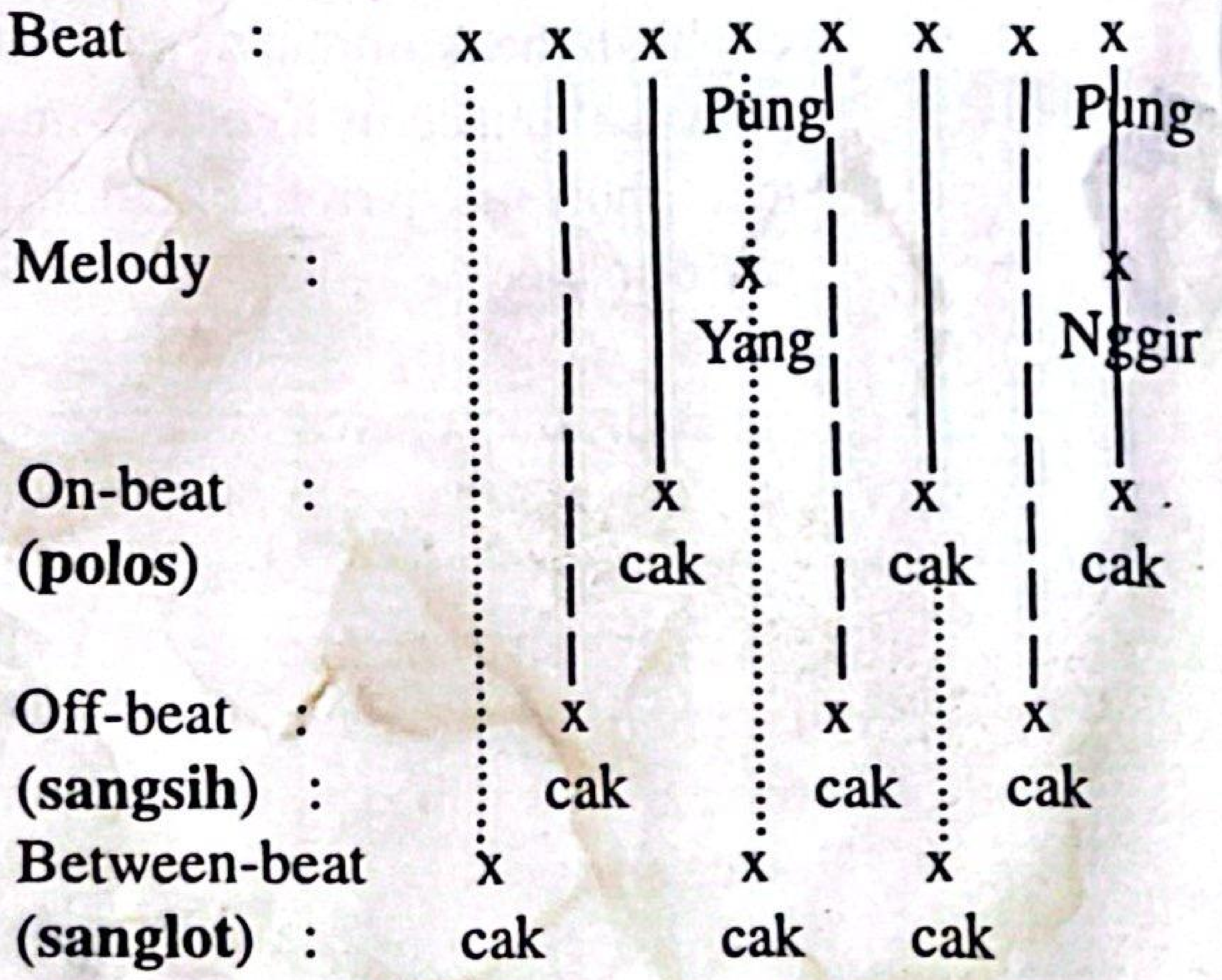

Cak Bona - Gianyar
Foto : Collections of Hartanto

The polyrhythmic vocal chanting that makes up the majority of the performance is played in an interlocking manner. Most Kecak chorus members know at least four different rhythmic patterns: syncopated three or **cak telu**, five or **cak lima**, six or **cak nem**, and the simple patterns or **cak ocel** of three and seven. The syncopated rhythmic patterns are respectively composed of three, five, and six strokes within one cycle that is marked in the melody by a gong-like sound—**sirrr**. Each of these rhythmic patterns can have two or three voices, depending whether the chorus member is chanting on-beat or **polos**, off-beat or **sangsih,** or between beat or **sanglot**. The simple pattern, respectively composed of three and seven strokes within one cycle, is chanted only in one voice.

Gong

Cak 3
Cak 5
Cak 4
Cak oneel 3+7

The different voices for one cycle of syncopated rhythm pattern three or **cak Telu** interlock in this way :


Beat :
x x x x x x x x
Pung
Pung
Melody :
x
Yang
x
Nggir
On-beat :
(polos)
x cak
x cak
x cak
Off-beat :
(sangsih) :
x cak
x cak
x cak
Between-beat
(sanglot) :
x cak
x cak
x cak

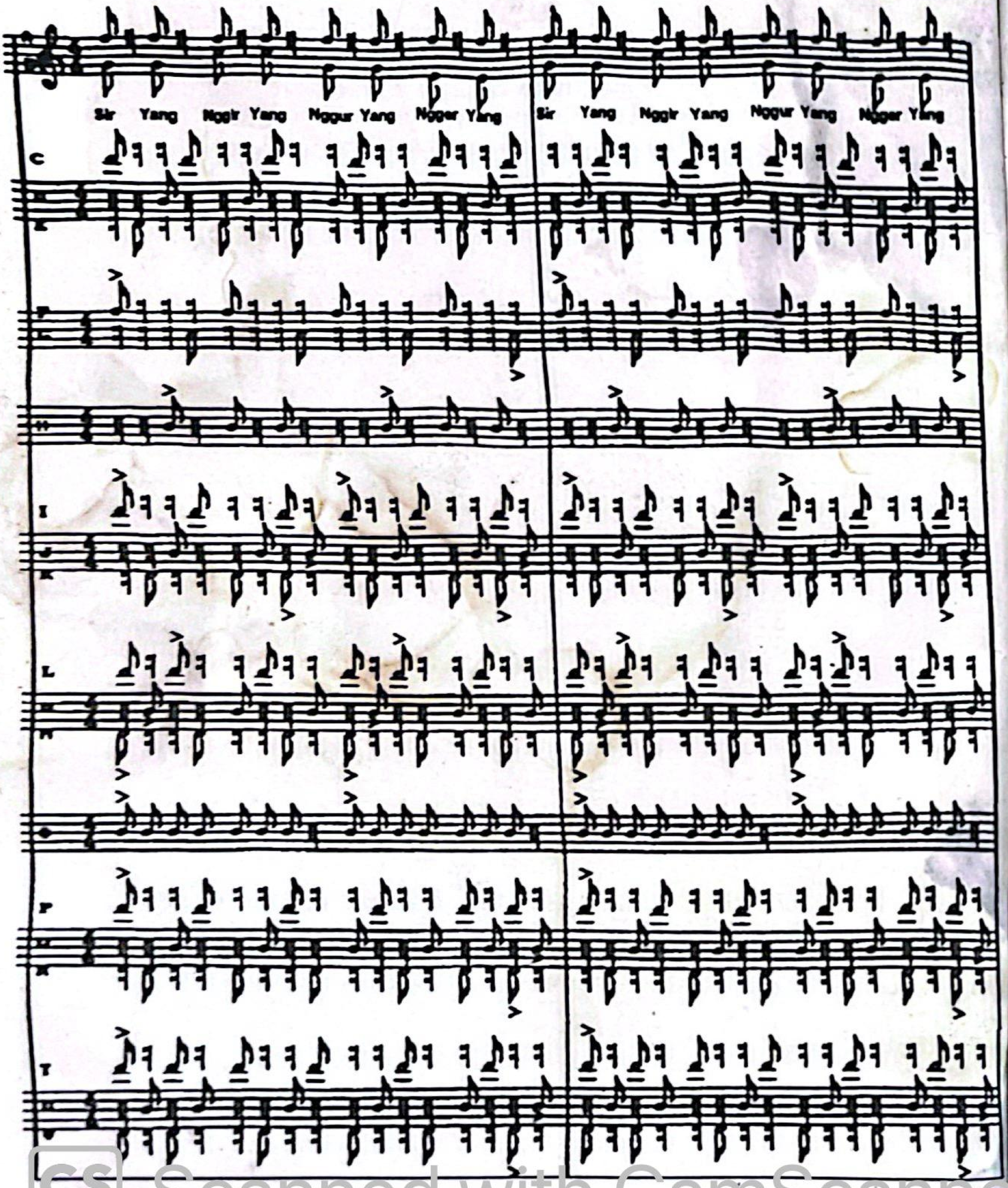
All of these different rhythmic patterns in their different voices are chanted simultaneously to create the rich tapestry of vocal chanting characteristic of Kecak (Metric chart of rhythmic patterns of Balinese Kecak is illustrated below).

METRIC CHART OF RHYTHMIC PATTERNS OF BALINESE KECAK

Motif : RHYTHMIC PATTERNS AND CYCLES
(in an eight-beat gilak form)

```
Kajar    : . . . P. . . P. . . P. . . P. . . P. . . P. . . P . . P
(Beat)   :
Melody   : . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
             Yang  Nggir  Yang  Nggur Yang  Ngger Yang  Sir
SHORT
Ls/1     : . . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. c
Ls/2     : . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. c.
Ls/3     : c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. c. .

Ngc/1    : . . . c. . . c. . . c. . . c. . . c. . . c. . . c. . . c
Ngc/2    : . . c. . . c. . . c. . . c. . . c. . . c. . . c. . . c.

3/Oce1   : . c. c. c. . . c. c. c. . . c. c. c. . . c. c. c. .
3/Pls/I  : . . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c
3/Ssh/I  : . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c.
3/Sgl/I  : c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. .
             :     :     :     :     :     :     :     :
3/Pls/II : . c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c
3/Ssh/II : c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c.
3/Sgl/II : . . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c. . c. . c. c

LONG

7/Ocel   : . c. c. c. c. c. c. . . c. c. c. c. c. c. c. . . c
6/Pls/I  : . . c. . c. . c. . c. c. c. . c. . c. . c. . c. c. c
6/Ssh/I  : . c. . c. . c. . c. c. c. . c. . c. . c. . c. c. c.
6/Sgl/I  : c. . c. . c. . c. c. c. . c. . c. . c. . c. c. c. .

6/Pls/II : . c. c. . c. . c. . c. . c. c. c. . c. . c. . c. . c
6/Ssh/II : c. c. . c. . c. . c. . c. c. c. . c. . c. . c. . c.
6/Sgl/II : . c. . c. . c. . c. . c. c. c. . c. . c. . c. . c. c
```

Rhythmic Patterns of Balinese Kecak in Western Notation


Sir Yang Nggir Yang Nggur Yang Ngger Yang
Sir Yang Nggir Yang Nggur Yang Ngger Yang
C
D
E
F
G
H
I
J
K
L
M
N
O
P
Q
R
T
U
V

NOTES FOR RHYTHMIC PATTERN OF BALINESE KECAK IN METRIC CHART AND WESTERN NOTATION

Ls/1 or C : Cak Lesung (rice pounding pattern), first voice.
Ls/2 or D : Cak Lesung (rice pounding pattern), second voice.
Ls/3 or E : Cak Lesung (rice pounding pattern), third voice.

Ngc/1 or F : Cak Ngoncang (two part-pattern), down beat.
Ngc/2 or G : Cak Ngoncang (two part-pattern), up beat.

3/Ocel or H : Cak Ocel (simple pattern) with three beats.

3/Pls/I or I : Cak Telu Polos (syncopated pattern three), on beat (version I).
3/Ssh/I or J : Cak Telu Sangsih (syncopated pattern three), up beat (version I).
3/Sgl/I or K : Cak Telu Sanglot (syncopated pattern three), in between (version I).

3/Pls/II or L : Cak Telu Polos (syncopated pattern three), on beat (version II).
3/Ssh/II or M : Cak Telu Sangsih (syncopated pattern three), up beat (version II)
3/Sgl/II or N : Cak Telu Sanglot (syncopated pattern three), in betwen (version II)

7/Ocel or O : Cak Ocel (simple pattern) with seven beats.

6/Pls/I or P : Cak Nem Polos (syncopated pattern six), on beat (version I).
6/Ssh/I or Q : Cak Nem Sangsih (syncopated pattern six), up beat (version I).
6/Sgl/I or R: Cak Nem Sanglot (syncopated pattern six), in between (version I)

6/Ols/II or T : Cak Nem Polos (syncopated pattern six), on beat (version II).
6/Ssh/II or U : Cak Nem Sangsih (syncopated pattern six), up beat (version II).
6/Sgl/II or V : Cak Nem Sanglot (syncopated pattern six), in between (version II)

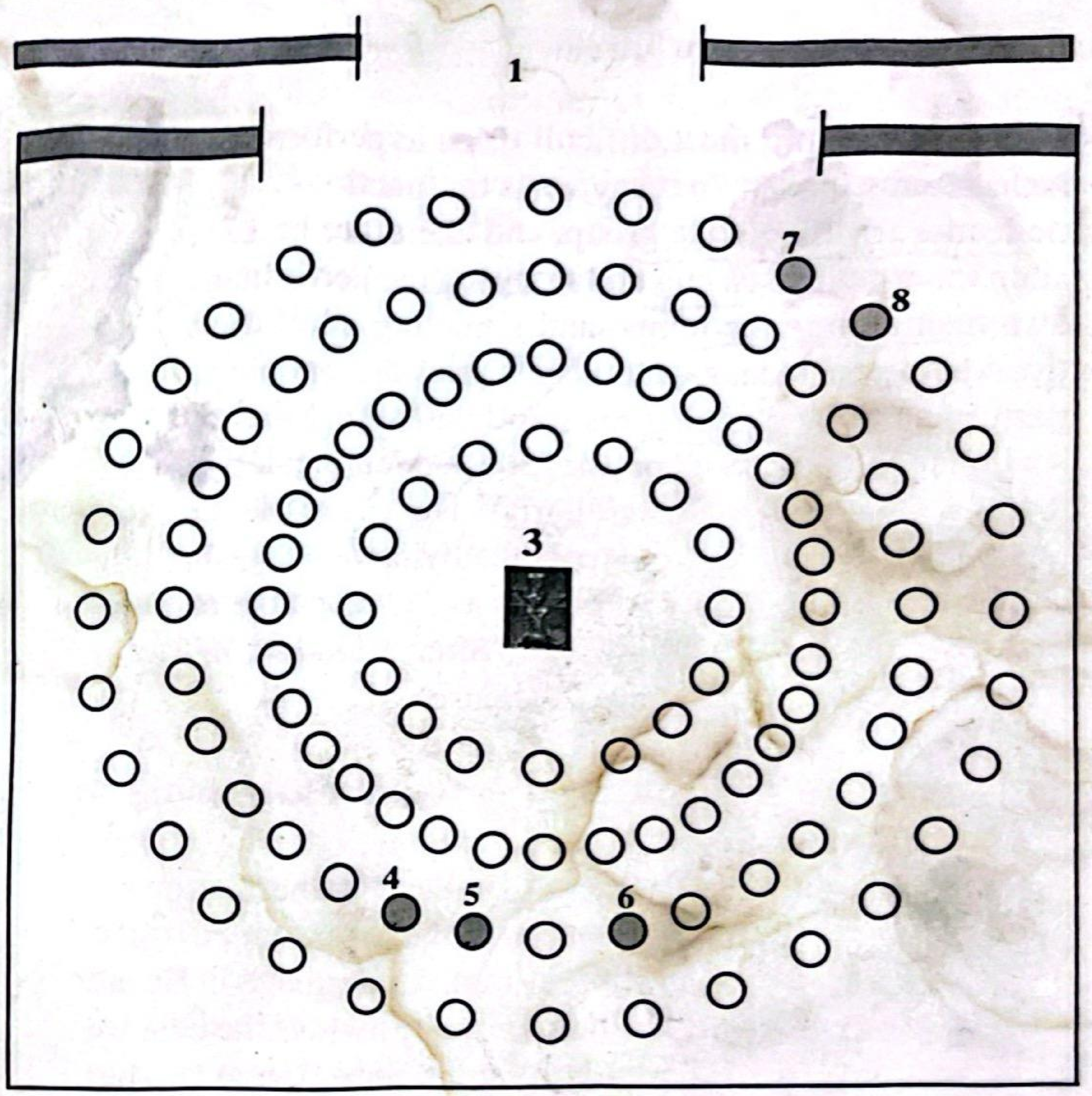
Two Beat long marked.

Depending on the performers' skill some Kecak groups may additionally employ a simple pattern of two, cak dua or ngoncang, which is only two beats long marked by alternation between the on and off beat, or some experienced chorus members, may include a complex improvised pattern known as **panyelah.**

Kecak Chorus—Pangecak

A typical Kecak chorus may have anywhere between seventy five to one hundred and fifty male members. The chorus will sing, recite, and chant all of the rhythmic patterns, as well represent monkey armies, ogres, and a few other characters featured in the play. The chorus is arranged in three or four concentric circles (as shown in page 17) with each quarter of the circle containing representatives of all of the rhythmic patterns in the chorus. Those who play the same pattern are placed next to each other and often during the performance will interact closely with one another. This organization insures all the rhythm patterns will be evenly balanced and the chanting will be tightly interlocked across the whole chorus.

Beside the basic chanters in the chorus, a few other special chorus members produce the complex multi-layered vocal chanting of Kecak. These include the beat keeper or **Juru klempung**, the melodic leader or **Juru gending**, the soloist or **Juru tembang**, the narrator or **dalang**, and the chorus leader or **Juru tarek**. Out of all of these chorus members no one is more important than the chorus leader who must coordinate all of the other members of the chorus.



Concentric circle formation as seen in Kecak performance by Blahkiuh group at the Bali Art Centre

1. Centre stage entrance
2. Side stage entrance
3. Tree Lamp
4. Beat Keeper - Juru Kelempung
5. Melodie Leader - Juru Gending
6. Chorus Leader - Juru Tarek
7. Dhalang - The Narrator
8. Soloist (Singer)

Chorus Leader—Juru Tarek

One of the most difficult roles to perform in Kecak is the chorus leader. In many ways he functions as the artistic leader for the whole group, and therefore he is responsible for not only starting and stopping the performance, but also maintaining the tempo and signaling all of the transitions between scenes. He may signal the opening of the performance by clapping his hand and signal the end of a section by calling "Sst" or ask for a sudden break by shouting "Uut." The chorus leader also controls the dynamics by shouting "Cak!" for a loud response or a soft "cak cak" after a loud "Cih" for a quiet response.

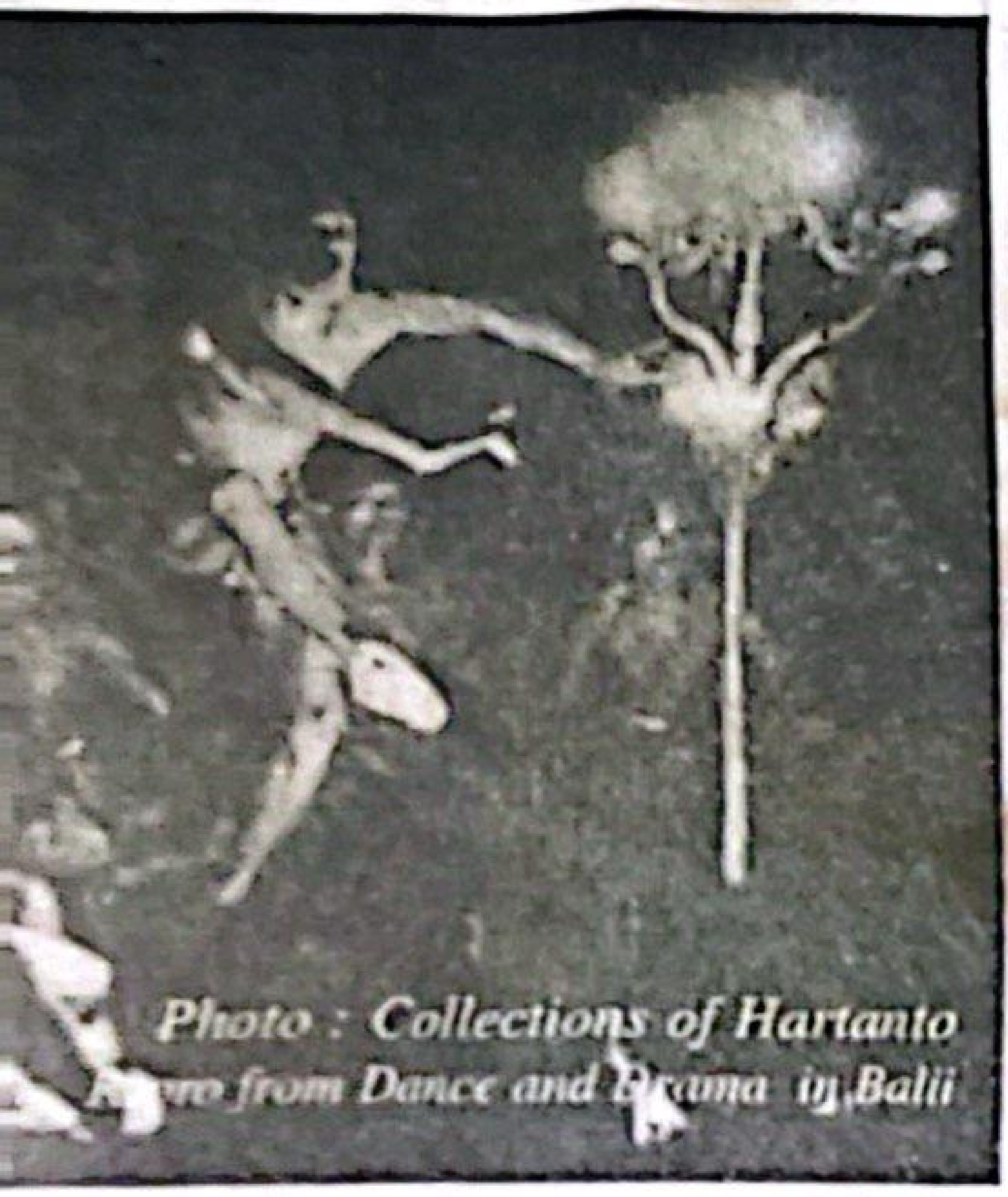


Photo : Collections of Hartanto
Repro from Dance and Drama in Balli

Beat Keeper—Juru Klempung

In Balinese orchestral music (gamelan) the beat is provided by the **kajar**, a single kettle gong. In Kecak the beat keeper provides the beat by regularly calling out, "pung." This sound must be heard across the whole chorus so that they can all follow the same tempo. Together with the chorus leader and the melodic leader, the beat keeper controls the speed of the chanting. Due to the difficulty of maintaining an even and loud beat for the length of the performance, most Kecak groups employ two beat keepers who can take turns in maintaining the beat.

Melodic Leader—Juru Gending

Like the lead metallophone **ugal** player in gamelan **gong kebyar**, the melodic leader maintains the melodic lines and their colotomic functions. Throughout the performance the melodic leader sings repeatedly melodies as simple and brief as, "*buk sir*" or as complex as, "*yang nggir yang nggur yang nggar yang sir*." He is also responsible for controlling the tempo along with the chorus leader and the beat keeper. Because of the difficulty of maintaining the melody for the whole performance, this role may be shared by two people.However, most groups only use one.

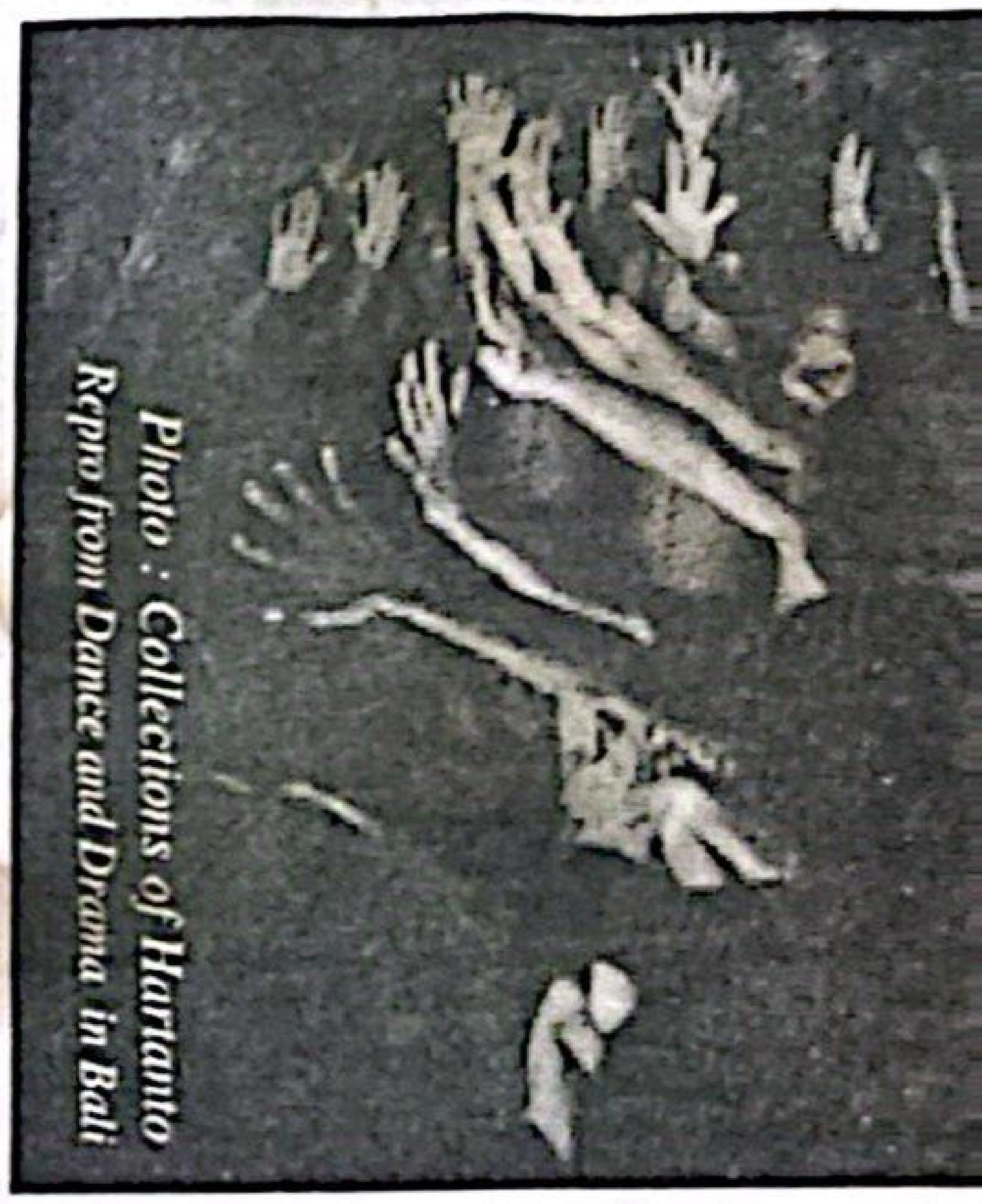


Photo : Collections of Hartanto
Repro from Dance and Drama in Bali

Soloists—Juru Tembang

There are two solo singers employed in a Kecak performance. One, usually female, sing the Balinese **macapat** song which sets the mood for Sita's sad scene while held prisoner in Alengka. For this scene the singer will chose a song with a sad mood, such as: **Sinom Wug Payangan**. The other singer, usually male, will sing the ancient Balinese **kakawin** and may also sing a free structured song, **tandak** or **sasendon**, to enrich the mood of the play. When singing, the soloist must always coordinate with the melodic leader, beat keeper, and the chorus leader.

The Narrator—Dalang

The male narrator used in the Kecak performance is the **dalang**. The word **dalang** is the name of the puppeteer/storyteller from the traditional shadow puppet theater—**Wayang Kulit**. Like a **Wayang Kulit** performance, the **dalang** is the person who verbally narrates the story, establishes the drama mood, and describes the action is the scene. perhaps the most important role of the **dalang** is to provide the dialogue for the more refined characters, such as Rama, Sita, and Laksmana, who never speak. In performing the role of the narrator, the **dalang** will utilize both contemporary Balinese language and the ancient Old Javanese **(Kawi)** language.

Through the complex interlocking vocal patterns in Kecak, one can see the merging of both old and new Balinese traditions. The irregular voice and monophonic songs were taken from the ancient **Sanghyang** trance performance, while the regular vocal patters have been adapted from the more contemporary melodic lines of **Gong Kebyar**. Together, these complementary vocal forms produce the aural beauty of Kecak.

Dance

The dance in Kecak is perhaps the simplest of all the major dramatic forms. The characters in the drama employ more intricate and formalized dance gestures whereas the chorus dance movements are more crude and

informal. The combination of both style of movement within Kecak is another example of how both the "little" and the "great" traditions of Bali can come together within one performing art form.

The Dance of the Chorus

The chorus movements are technically not too complex so that anyone can find them easy to perform. Although there are some chorus movements that are executed while standing, most are made while seated crosslegged in conjunction with the chanting and singing. The chorus most often moves independently of the story [with abstract gestures used to express mood], or occasionally they support the story by taking on roles such as the monkey army, the wind, or a garden.

When chanting, the chorus members sit in a cross-legged **masila** position. Both thighs are pushed to the floor, the torso and chest is held upright while the waist remains relaxed. When the chorus gestures involve their hands the fingers are always spread out and vibrating.

Two of the most common chorus movements while standing are **malpal** and **ngore**. **Malpal** is a movement phrase involving an accentuated walk in an even marching tempo. Both legs are turned out with the knees bent while the hands are held above the head. **Ngore** means to imitate the sound and movement of monkeys. In **ngore** the chorus makes a squeaking monkey sound while running in place with their legs turned out and the knees bent. They also

vibrating

make free sweeping motions with the arms as if the chorus was waving or rubbing a window.

While seated the chorus can produce a wide variety of dance movements such as:

Nyembah: the gesture for praying. Both hands are first put together at the level of the forehead, and then they quickly split open with the palm facing up. This hand gesture is used for receiving holy water from the temple priest **(pamangku)**.

Ngilut: the body rotates from side to side, followed by a swing of the arms with the palms facing down.

Ngoyog: the chorus sways side to side with the hands on the knees while quickly bouncing up and down.

Ngelayak: like **ngoyog**, but the hands are placed above the head. Another variation includes falling forward with the hands on the knees and the arms bent outward.

Ngloyor: consists of lateral rocking back and forth with one hand extended while the other is crossed in front of the chest.

The Dance of the Leading Characters

The dance movements of the main characters of the drama are based on classical Balinese dances such as the **Wayang Wong** dance-drama and the **kebyar dance**. All of the movements of the leading characters are more formal as they maintain the basic body posture of classical Balinese dance.

This basic body posture consists of standing with the thighs and feet turned out about 45 degree with the knees bent and the toes flexed upward. From this standing position the abdominal area is held in, while the chest is pulled up and gently arched back.

While both male and female characters use this basic body posture. However, female characters move with less accentuated and more flowing gestures than the male characters, who have a wider stance and a longer stride. The types of movements most frequently used by both male and female characters include:

Gandang-gandang: a slow dignified walk where both hands are extended and held up to shoulder level. Between steps one of the elbows turns in slightly bent.

Malpal: a rapid walk with one hand held at an angle to the body and the other bent forward of the body.

Nayog: a slow dignified walk where each step is initiated by a subtle rotation on the ball of the free foot taking the step, which is followed by a gentle swaying of the body as it moves forward. Both arms flow with the movement and may be either bent or extended as they move slowly up and down.

Nglikas: A rather slow, sustained forward walk with the knees bent. Each leg is crossed in front of the other.

Glatik Mapah: a step (usually one step) to either side that is followed by a quarter turn as the foot crosses in front.

Gandang Arep: a slow forward walk followed by a swaying, side-to-side, movement of the upper body. One hand is extended over the head and the other is held on the side of the body, with wrist flexed or extended. When this movement is done with back- ward steps it is called **gandang uri**.

Ngumbang a fast continuous walk with different floor patterns (a half circle or a figure eight) with the arms either bent or extended at chest level or higher.

Ulap-ulap: looking or peering from a distance, both hands at face level with the wrist bent while the body leans either forward or backward.

Ngawuta Ngawa Sari: standing on one leg while the other is lifted with the knees bent, one hand touches the knee of the lifted leg while the other hand is bent over the head.

Ngopak Lantang: a movement phrase that involves two to four steps followed by standing on one leg with both knees bent (from deep to medium). One hand is extended above the head, and the other is bent at chest level.

Ngeseh Bawak: a brief phrase of movement involving one or two steps with a small rotation on the free foot, while both hands are held (bent or extended) at the chest level or higher.

There are also a few other movements that add detail and refinement to all of those describe above.

Nyaledet: accentuated eye movement to the side.

Nyarere: looking at an object without turning the head.

Nuding: a hand gesture with the index and middle fingers extended used for pointing at something.

Nigtig: Beating with the branch of a tree.

Nanjung: kicking by one leg.

The Story and Theme

Kecak is a flexible performing arts form that can take all kind of stories derived from any different dramatic sources. In spite of this fact, most audiences always tend to associate Kecak with the Ramayana, or even go so far as to define Kecak as a Ramayana dramatic form. These assumptions are based on the story that is regularly enacted for a Kecak performance.

Like most Balinese dramatic form, the central theme of the Kecak story is the struggle between two conflicting powers (**rwa bhineda**), good versus evil. Keeping this in mind, one can fine in the Ramayana epic a moral and philosophical truth behind the actions. Rama, the hero of the epic is an incarnation of the Hindu God Visnu and represents all that is good and noble. Rahwana, on the other hand, is greedy and lustful and represents evil. Eventhough a performance of the Ramayana represents a struggle between good and evil, a Kecak performance may not explicitly show the death of Rahwana. Everyone always assumes that the last victory will be on Rama's side.

The Ramayana, and the other popular Hindu epic, the Mahabhrata, was already well-known in Bali and Java by at least the ninth centuries A.D. It is important to note that the Ramayana is as much a Balinese epic as it is an Indian epic. In Bali over one thousand stanzas of the Ramayana **kakawin** still comprise one of the most important dramatic sources on the island and to this day is still recited in the ancient **Kawi** (Old Javanese) for personal edification and special religious ceremonies.

The Balinese Ramayana Kakawin is composed of seven parts or **kandha**. Each part has a different focus and dramatic plot which itself may consist of several stories. Below is the story in the **Ramayana Kakawin** as it is divided in the different parts or **kandha**.

Bala Kandha tells the story of the young Rama, who is accompanied by his younger brother Laksmana, as they enter a forest to help the sage Wiswamitra destroy a group of demons. The demons are lead by Marica of Alengka, who is notorious for disturbing hermits as they are conducting their meditation. After destroying these demons, Wiswamitra advises Rama to take part in the royal archery suitor contest in the Metila kingdom. Rama wins the contest and marries princess Sita.

Ayodya Kandha tells of the tragedy that befalls the Ayodya palace with the banishment of prince Rama from his inherited kingdom. Rama, who is about to be inaugurated as the new king of Ayodya, must obey his father king Dasarata, who is forced to concede to his second wife Kekayi and place her son Bratha on the throne. Accompanied by his beautiful wife Sita, and his younger brother Laksmana, Rama goes into exile in the forest leaving his father to die of grief. Upon the death of Dasarata, Bratha agrees to become king, while Rama is completing his twelve years of exile.

Aranya Kandha contains the story of the abduction of Sita in the Dandaka forest where Rama is exiled. Rahwana the great king of demons lures Rama and Laksmana away from Sita's side with the illusion of a beautiful golden deer (who is actually the demon Marica in disguise). Rahwana captures Sita and takes her to his kingdom in Alengka. Along the way a giant bird named Jatayu comes to Sita's rescue. In this struggle Jatayu is mortally wounded by Rahwana, but he lives long enough to tell Rama of Sita's abduction.

Kiskenda Kandha begins with the life and death battle between two monkey brothers Subali and Sugriwa over a misunderstanding between them. The problem begins when the two monkey brothers are fighting the twin demon kings Mahesasura and Lembusura who live in a cave called Kiskenda. In the fight Sugriwa believes that Subali has been killed by the twin demon kings in the cave, and so he seals it up. Subali eventually escapes the sealed cave and attacks Sugriwa in revenge. When Sugriwa meets Rama, he has been wrongfully banished by his brother Subali. Rama agrees to help Sugriwa regain his throne in return for Sugriwa's lending him his armies to rescue Sita.

Sundara Kandha tells of the adventure of the brave and energetic monkey general Hanoman, who becomes the devoted follower of Rama. Rama sends Hanoman to Rahwana's kingdom in Alengka to locate Sita. After overcoming all kinds of obstacles along the way, Hanoman arrives in Alengka. He presents Rama's ring to Sita who then gives him a flower to return to Rama. Before leaving Alengka Hanoman destroys a part of Rahwana's palace garden and sets the city of Alengka on fire.

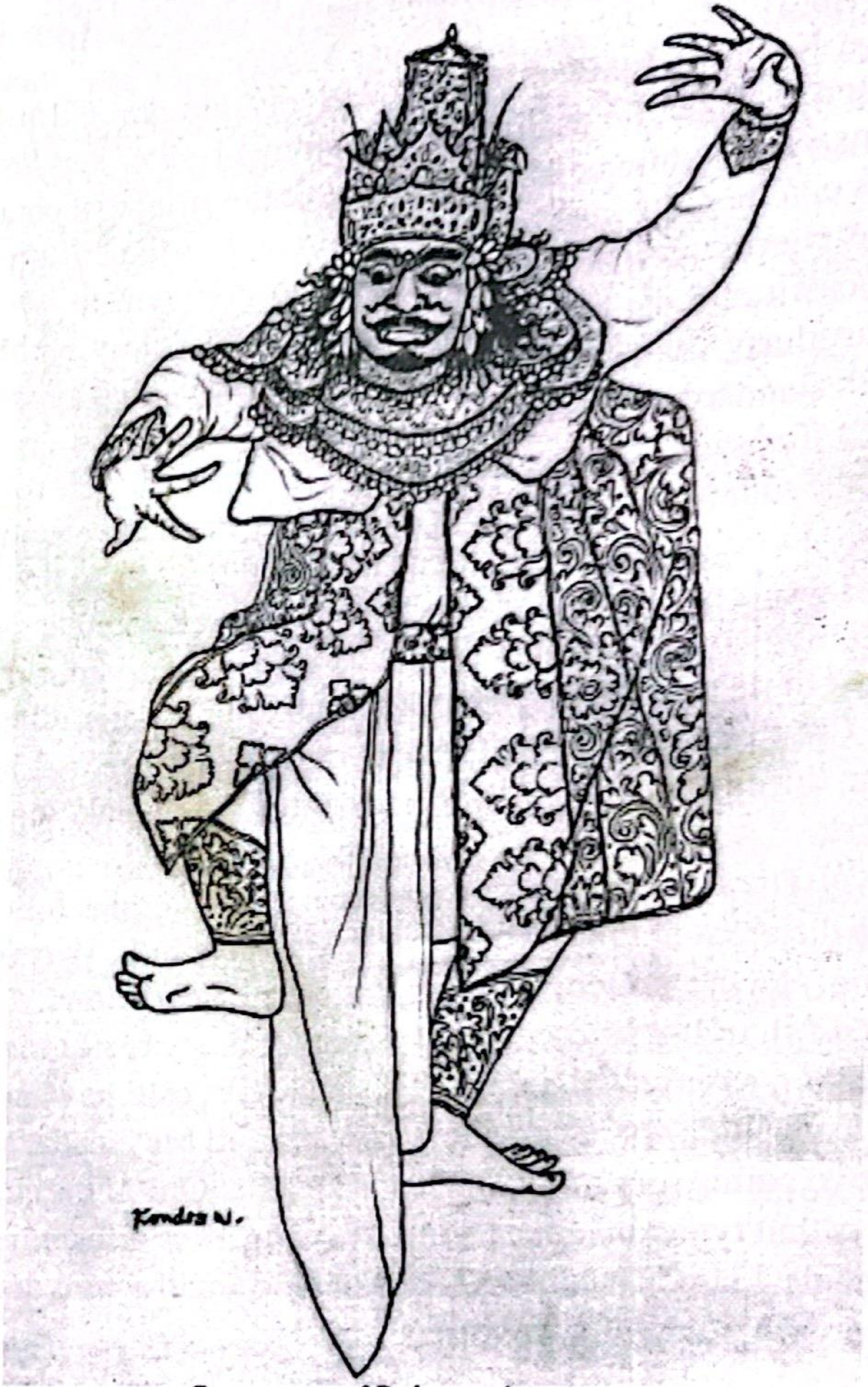
Yudha Kandha contains the story of the bloody battle between Rama and Rahwana which causes massive death and destruction to the armies of Alengka. The first to die is Rahwana's wise old minister, Prahasta, and later Rahwana's own son Meganada and brother Kumbakarna are killed by Rama and Laksmana. In the end Rahwana is killed

Photo : Collections of Hartanto
Reproduced from Dance and Drama in Bali

and Rama and Sita are reunited.

Uttara Kandha relates how Sita, who is now pregnant by Rama, is eventually abandoned by him, because he feels she was unfaithful to him while she was a prisoner in Alengka. Sita is comforted in exile by the sage Walmiki, who raises her twin sons, **Kusa** and **Lava,** and teaches them the story of their father's life — the Ramayana. In the end, after listening to the recitation of the Ramayana story by the twins, Rama realizes that **Kusa** and **Lava** are his twin sons. Soon he also realizes his mistake and goes in search of Sita, but he is too late as Sita has already returned to her mother, the earth. Rama accepts his twin sons and passes on the throne to them.

One of the most commonly performed episodes in Kecak is **Kapandung Sita** or **The Abduction of Sita**. In this performance episodes are taken from the **Aranya Kandha**, the **Sundara Kandha**, and the **Yudha Kandha**. In brief, the story begin with the abduction of Sita in the Dandaka forest, and then relate how Rama and Laksamana are aided by Sugriwa and Hanoman in defeating Rahwana. (The story is given in greater detail in the chapter KECAK IN PERFORMANCE).



Sasaputan of Rahwana's costume

Costumes, Make-up, and Masks

Kecak Ramayana has a relatively simple and unadorned look and its performance employs lighter and less expensive costuming. The costumes for the principal characters can be quite stylized and elaborate, but the costume of the chorus members was initially no different to what Balinese traditionally wore in everyday life. Only within the last thirty years has the Kecak chorus developed a more or less standard appearance.

Today, all chorus members, regardless of their role, wear the same uniform costume. This consists of three items: a black loincloth (**kain**) wrapped around the waist so that it hang just above the knees; a black and white checkered sash (**saput**) worn over the loincloth; and a along scarf (**umpal**) is used to tie together the other items about the waist. Other than the three white dots (**gecek**) on the temples and between the eyes, no one in the chorus wear either make-up or a mask.

The costumes for the principal dancing roles follow three different dramatic forms: classical **Gambuh, Wayang Wong,** and the modern Balinese Ramayana **Sendratari**. The style of the **Gambuh** costume, Sasaputan, is characterized by a long robe called **saput**. This style of costume is used by strong male characters like Rahwana and Meganada, and the two comic servants Twalen and Delem. One of the characters that typically appears in a **Wayang Wong** costume is the eagle, Garuda, who uses layers of long small aprons decorated with gold paint (**awiran**).

The remaining characters use the stylized costumes of the Ramayana **Sendratari**. These costumes characteristically for men have a short ornamented skirt (**kain**) that covers the lower part of the body down to the knees, and for the women a long decorated skirt wrapping the entire length of the body. In addition to these basic costumes ornaments and crown are added according to the character being portrayed. Waist decorations (**ampok-ampok**), ornamented scarfs (**sampur**), neck bands (**badong**), anklets, and wristlets (gelang kana) all add ornamentation to the dancers' costumes.

The color of the costume indicates the type of character, either strong or refined; good or evil. The good and refined characters such as Rama and Sita are dressed in green, while the evil and coarse characters like Rahwana and Meganada are dressed in red. The monkey general Hanoman, wears white because he is the son of the wind god Bayu and therefore semi-divine. The golden deer symbolizes the wealth and riches of the kingdom of Alengka, and the comic servant Twalen wears black as a sign of his maturity.

Every character wears a different headdress or **gelungan** as a sign of their social status. For example, Rama's headdress is **candi utama**, which indicates the rank of a prince; Sita's head- dress is **kakendon** to indicate the rank of princess; Rahwana's headdress is **candi kurung** for the rank of king; and Hanoman, Meganada and Laksamana wear a headdress for the royal warrior known as **sinapiturang**.

Five out of the twelve principal characters in Kecak wear a wooden mask. These are the comic servants, Twalen and Delem, the eagle Garuda, the monkey general Hanoman, and the monkey king Sugriwa. The comic servant and the Garuda all use full face masks that completely cover the performers' faces and are attached to their headdresses in the same way they are used in the classical Ramayana **Wayang Wong**. The rest of the masked characters use more contemporary half face masks based on those in the modern Ramayana **Sendratari**, which cover only the lower part of the face, below the eyes.

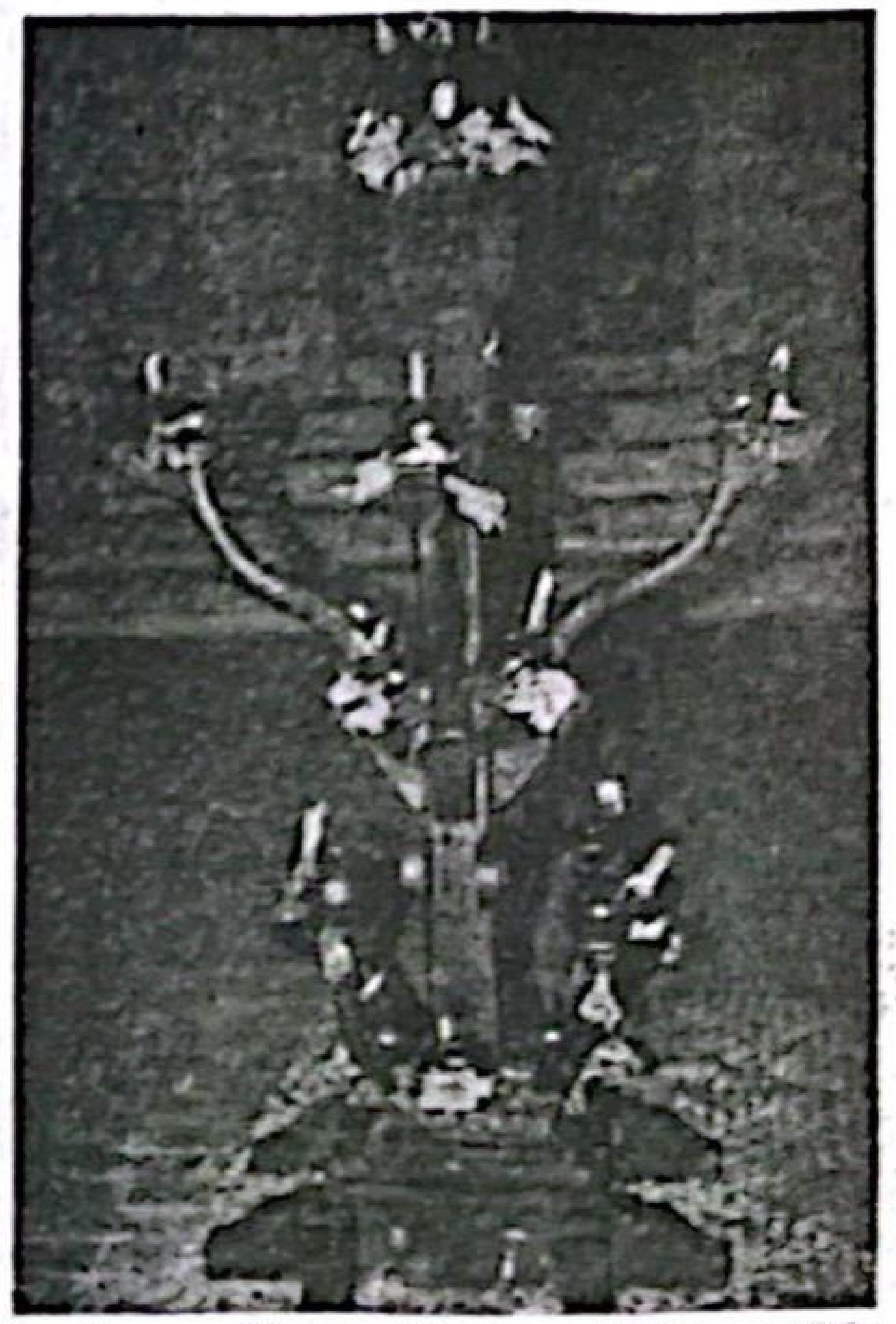
The remaining characters depending on type and gender will wear theatrical make-up. The more refined characters have the simplest character make-up and appear the most natural, which is just light powder, eyebrow pencil, eyeliner, and lipstick. All of the strong male characters have more exaggerated make-up, red faces with thick black mustaches and eyebrows. A few expressive dark or light lines are added to give these characters a more demonic appearance.

Lighting

Kecak, like the Balinese shadow puppet tradition **Wayang Kulit**, uses coconut oil lamps that produce a soft flickering light. About fifteen to seventeen lampwicks of different sizes are placed in clay bowls filled with coconut oil. These are placed on a tall wooden stand (about one and a half meters) which is shaped like a tree guarded by dragons (**naga**). The nagas face different directions with their tails meeting in the tree. The smallest lamps are placed around the bottom of the tree lamp stand, medium size lamps around the middle, and the largest, multi-wicked lamp is placed at the top of the tree.

The lamp tree, the **damar Kecak**, is positioned in the center of the chorus circle so that its yellow flickering rays will light the faces, hands, and bodies of the chorus. The position of the tree lamp marks the center of the performing space where principal characters enact the drama.

The lighting for a Kecak performance undoubtedly follows the practices of the traditional **Sanghyang** trance dance. In both **Sanghyang Jaran** and **Sanghyang Dedari** performances the flame is made of a burning pile of coconut husks placed in the center of the performance area. Unlike Kecak, however, as the flame grows larger in the **Sanghyang** performance, the dancers in trance run through the flames, scattering the fire without getting burnt.



Tree Lamp : *Photo collections of I Wayan Dibia*

Nowadays some Kecak troupes use modern electrical lighting, but this is used mainly to enhance the visibility of the performance and not for any dramatic effects. Much of the magical atmosphere of a Kecak performance depends on the traditional coconut oil lamp light radiating from the center of the circle.

KECAK RAMAYANA IN PERFORMANCE

The performance of Kecak, featuring "**The Abduction of Sita**", normally lasts from 50 minutes to one hour. The performance is usually constructed in four sections: **papeson**, a brief entrance of the chorus; **pategak**, the opening piece; **lampahan,** the enactment of the story; and **panyuwud**, the exit.

The Entrance— Papeson

After the flickering lamps are lit, the chorus enters the stage by marching while chanting, or running with monkey cries and squeaks. They than sit in a circle formation around the lamp. After the chorus is seated and silent, the temple priest, **pamangku**, enters to bless the chorus and the performance space by sprinkling holy water.

The Opening— Pategak

As the priest walks off stage, the chorus sings the opening song (**pategak**). This to be followed by a recitation of an invocation by the narrator (**dalang**), over the chanting by the chorus. This is to invoke the blessing of the god of arts for the success of the performance. Later, while the chorus members continue to chant and move (mostly in a sitting position), the **Kakawin** singer or **juru kakawin** sings the first stanza of the **Ramayana Kakawin** to describes the background of the story. This section ends with a short pause in the vocal chant.

The Enactment of The Story— Lampahan

The story of "**the Abduction of Sita**" unfolds in five main acts, and encompasses 13 scenes. It begins with the peaceful life of Rama and Sita and the Dandaka forest, and it ends with the reunion of Sita and Rama after their long separation.

Act One (Dandaka)

Scene 1

The first to appear in this scene is Rama and his wife Sita. While they are enjoying the beauty of the Dandaka forest, a beautiful golden deer (the demon Marica, Rahwana's companion in disguise) enters to seduce Sita. Enchanted by the deer, Sita entreats Rama to capture it for her. Laksmana appears with an arrow for Rama. Before departing to capture the deer, Rama orders Laksmana to protect Sita. After Rama leaves, Laksmana requests Sita to wait with him for Rama's return.

Scene 2

Rama enters the jungle to capture the deer. Unable to catch the deceitful deer, Rama draws his arrow and shoots it. As his arrow strikes it, the deer resumes its demonic figure (Marica) and runs while shouting for help.

Scene 3

Sita, hearing this shout, believes that it is Rama's. She immediately commands Laksmana to help his brother. Forced by Sita, (but only after an argument) Laksmana leaves her by herself. Before leaving Sita, Laksmana draws a magic circle on the ground around her for her protection.

Scene 4

Shortly after Laksmana leaves, Rahwana jumps in and approaches Sita. Knowing that Sita is protected by a magic circle, Rahwana uses his trickery to make Sita walk out of the circle. As she comes closer, Rahwana catches and pulls Sita's hand and at once he returns to his original form and takes her to Alengka.

Upon his arrival in his home kingdom, Rahwana receives a warm welcome and greetings from the people of Alengka. With them Rahwana celebrates the success of his journey to abduct Sita.

Act Two (Alengka)

Scene 1

Vocal interlude, the **pangalang**, from the chorus elaborated by the voice of the narrator to describe the dramatic content, mood, and actions in the up-coming scene.

Scene 2

Sita appears in the palace garden of Alengka with Trijata, Rahwana's niece, who has become protector and friend in captivity. Sita weeps at her fate while waiting for Rama to rescue her [These actions are accompanied by a slow vocal chant in conjunction with a solo **macapat** song "Sinom Wug Payangan"]

Scene 3

The mighty white monkey Hanoman appears before Sita. At first she is frightened by Hanoman's sudden arrival. But when he shows her Rama's ring, he wins confidence. After receiving the ring, Sita gives Hanoman a flower from her hair to give Rama to show her faithful love. Before leaving Alengka, Hanoman wrecks the garden, destroys buildings in the palace grounds, and sets the city of Alengka on fire. This is a warning to Rahwana of the massive destruction that is sure to come if he does not free Sita and return her to Rama. [At the end of this scene, the chorus stops the chant for a brief pause].

Act Three (Alengka)

Scene 1

The battle begins. Rama, Laksmana, their comic servant Twalen, and their monkey army arrive in Alengka to attack and destroy Rahwana.

Scene 2

As the battle begins, Rahwana's son Meganada arrives with his comic servant Delem. Using a powerful weapon, Meganada ensnares Rama, Laksmana and the entire army in the grip of a giant serpent [depicted with Rama and Laksmana sitting motionless near the tree lamp, inside a circle of the chorus lying back on each other's stomaches].

Scene 3

When Rama quietly invokes the gods for help, the mighty bird Garuda arrives to free Rama, Laksmana, and their army. After almost being defeated by Meganada, Rama laments his fate [accompanied by a sad song by the chorus].

Act Four (Alengka)

Scene 1

After hearing Twalen calling his name, Rama's commander-in-chief Sugriwa comes to fight Meganada. He commands the monkey army to prepare the attack (with cries and squeaks) and challenge Meganada [the chorus split into two groups, each representing Sugriwa's and Meganada's armies].

Scene 2

Meganada enters and fights Sugriwa. With the help of Hanoman, Sugriwa defeats Meganada. After this victory, the monkey troops cheer their leaders.

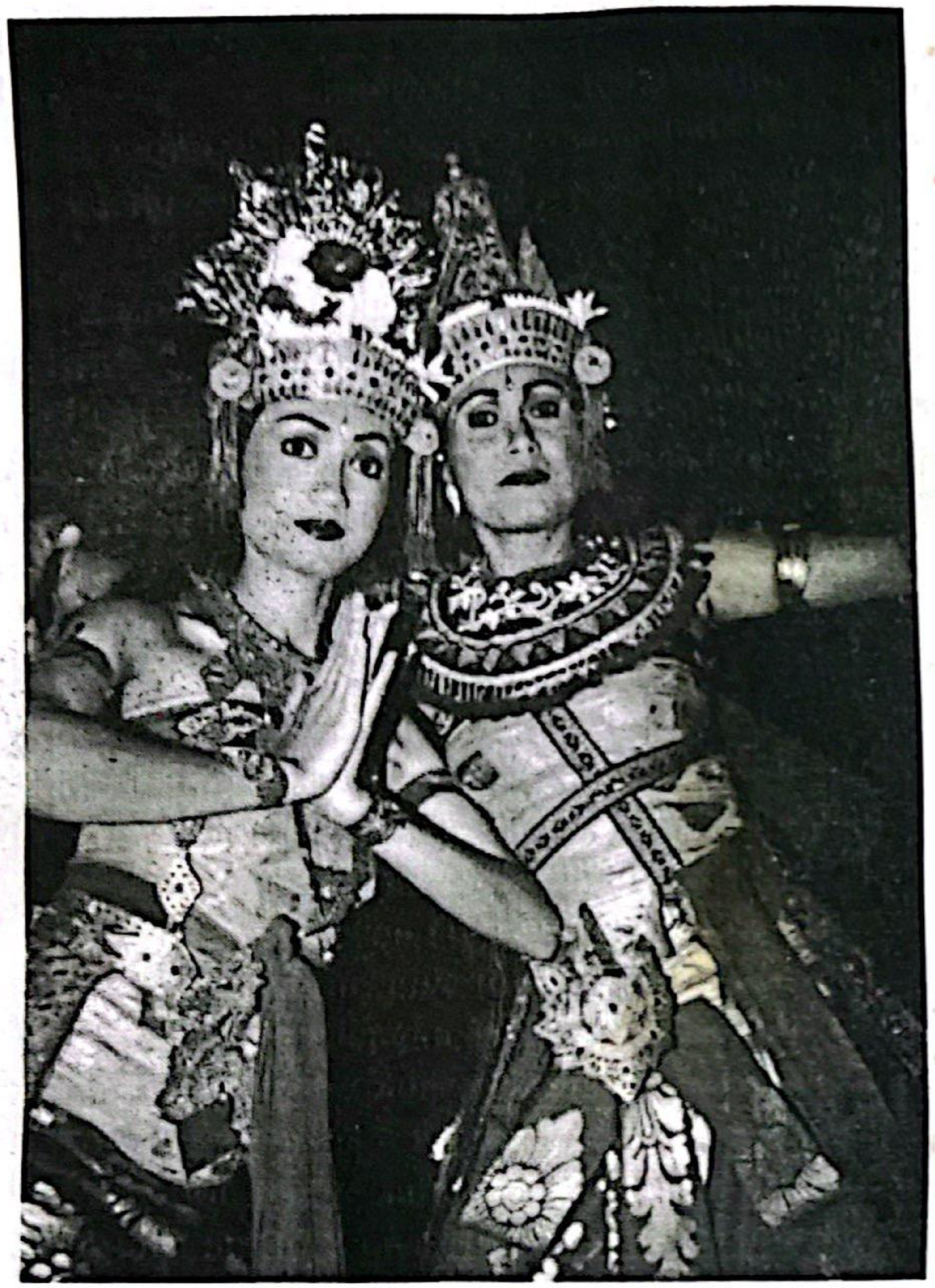
Act Five (Alengka)

Scene 1

Upon the destruction of Rahwana (indicated by the killing of Meganada by Sugriwa), Rama and Sita are reunited. This rendezvous is witnessed by Laksmana, Hanoman, and Sugriwa and the entire monkey army [the chorus members gradually move and line up around the stage entrance or split gate]. After embracing and kissing Sita, Rama commands his followers to leave Alengka [Rama and Sita, followed by Laksmana and the two monkey generals, walk off stage through the chorus]

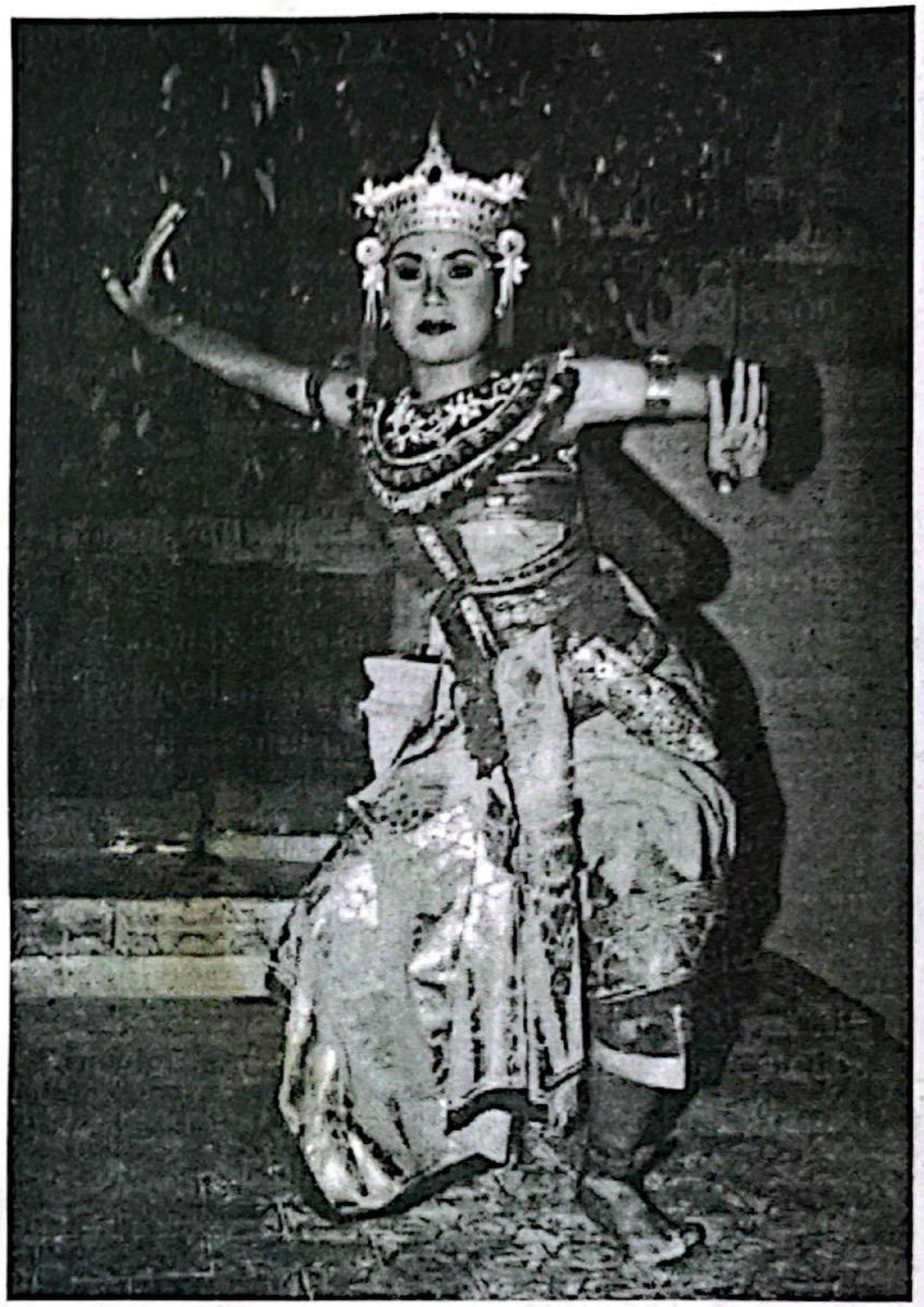
THE EXIT (PANYUWUD)

After Rama, Sita, and the other principal characters have departed, the chorus backs away while chanting. They gather at the stage entrance or split gate to conclude the performance with a sudden stop of chanting and bow to the audience.



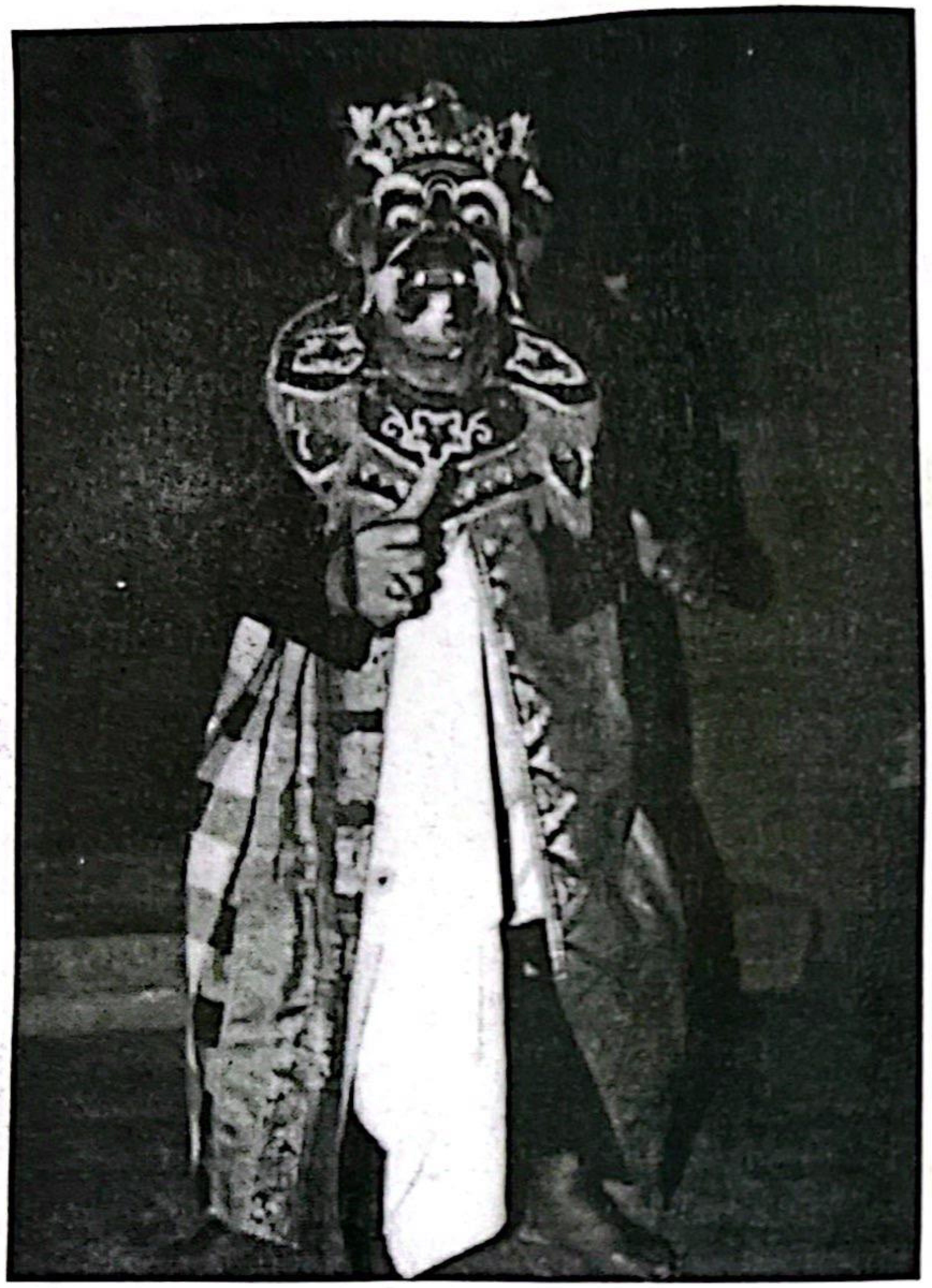
1. Rama (right), Prince of Ayodya, son of King Dasarata with Sita (left), Rama's wife from Metila Kingdom.

Kecak Blahkiuh, *photo collection of I Wayan Dibia*



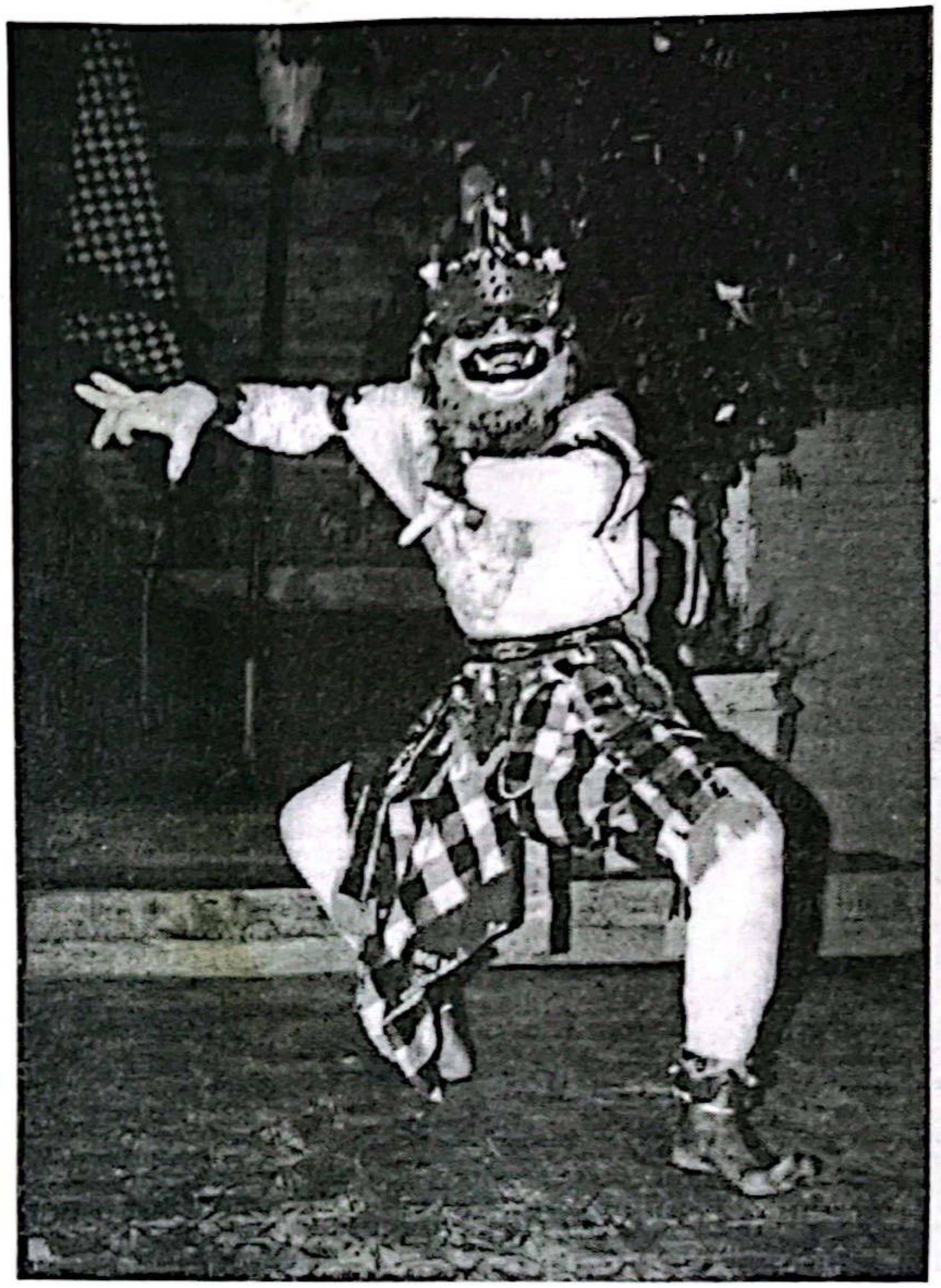
2. Laksmana : Rama's younger brother.

Kecak Blahkiuh, *photo collection of I Wayan Dibia*



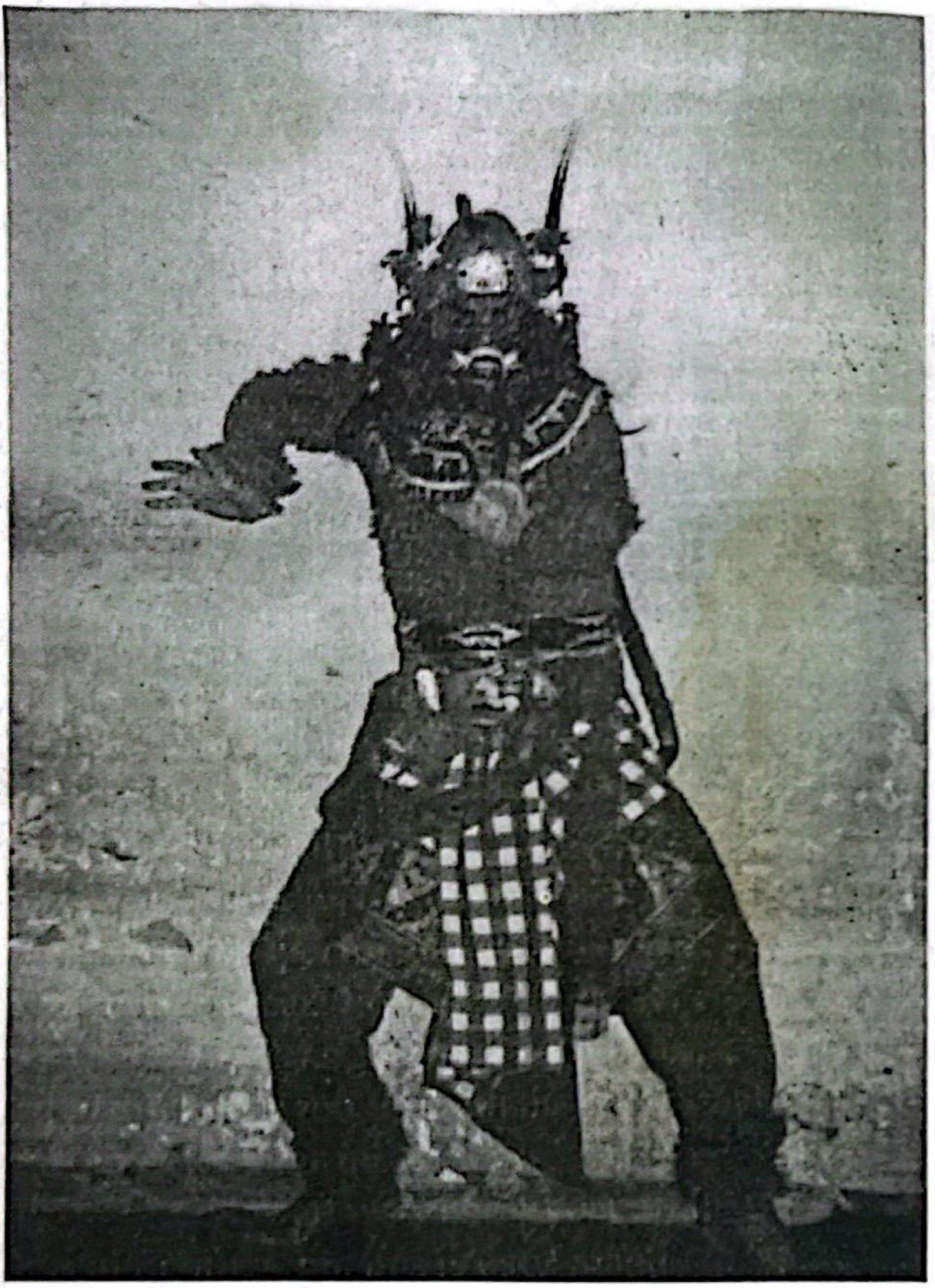
3. Twalen : Rama's comic servant.

Kecak Blahkiuh, *photo collection of I Wayan Dibia*



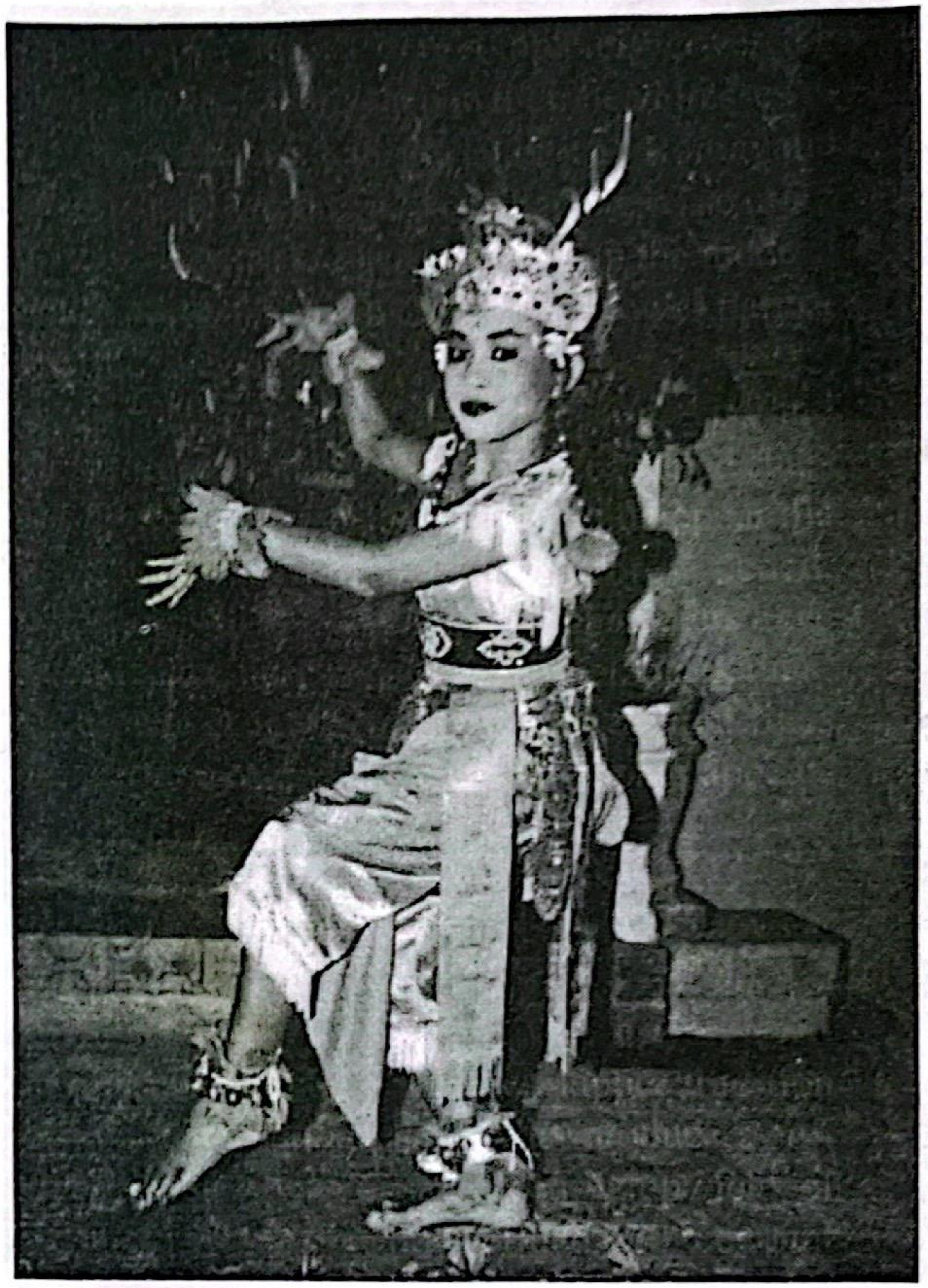
4. Hanoman: The monkey general, Rama's follower.

Kecak Blahkiuh, *photo collection of I Wayan Dibia*



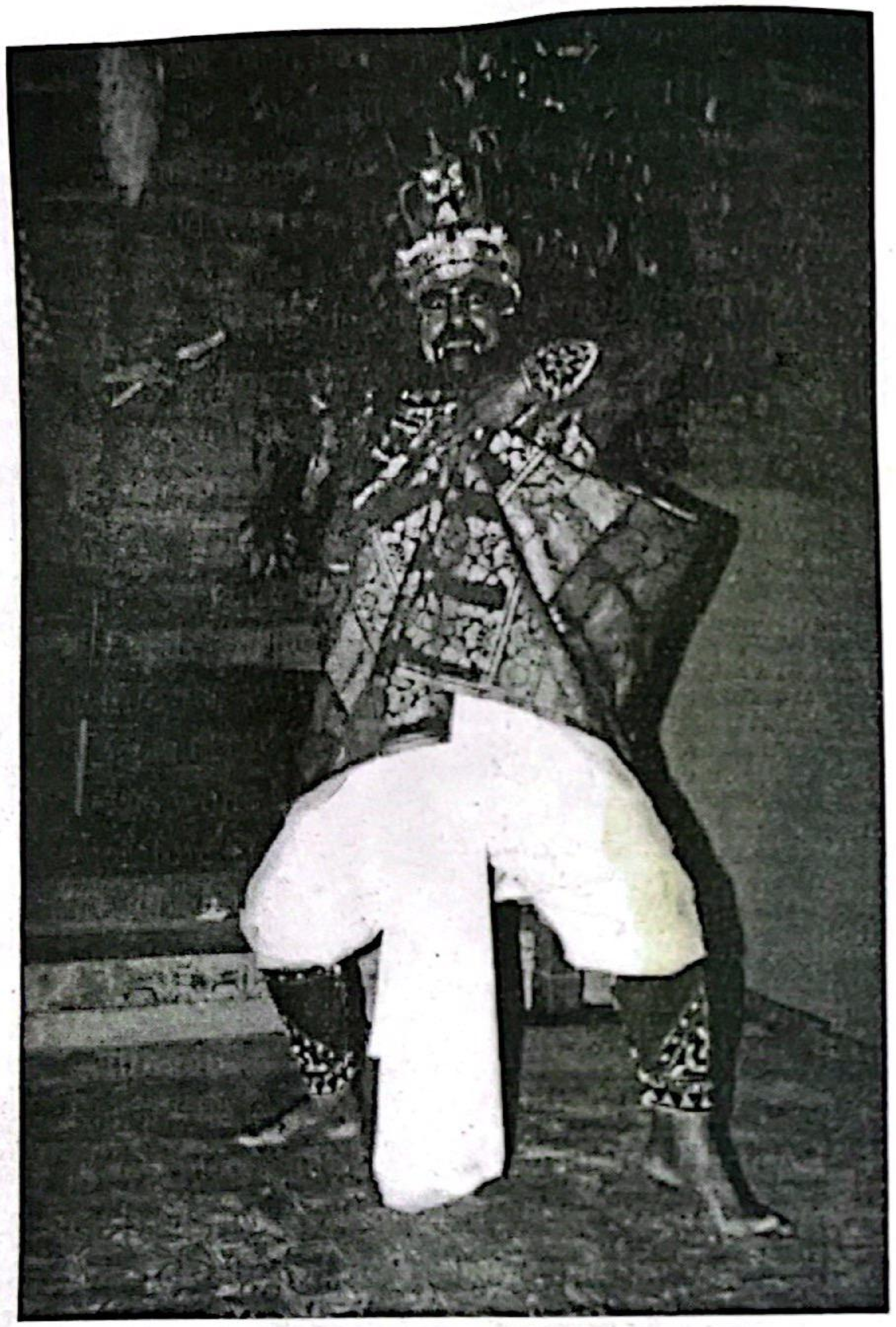
5. *Sugriwa : The monkey king, Rama's follower.*

STSI Denpasar, *photo collection of I Wayan Dibia*



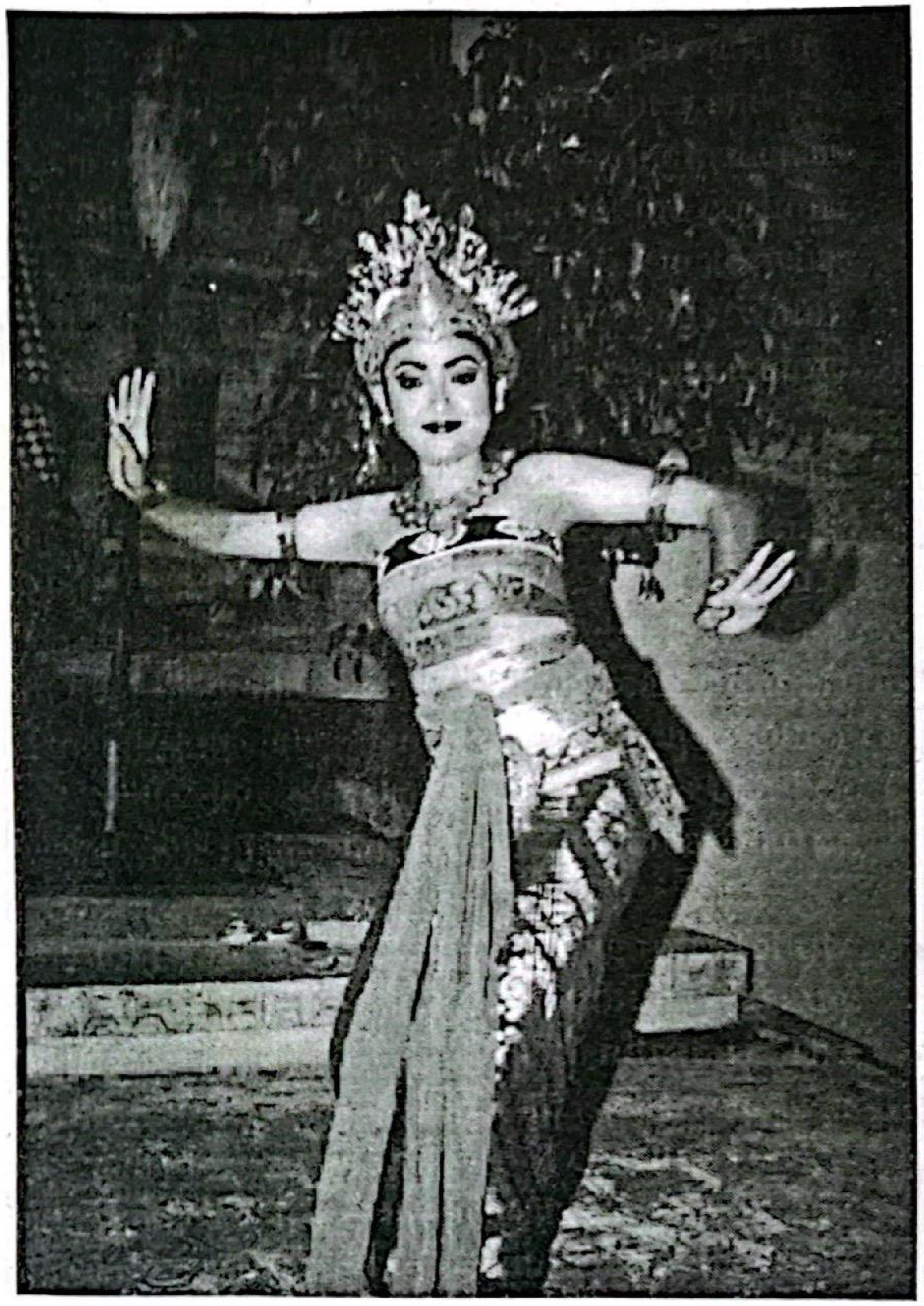
6. *Golden Deer : Demon Marica of Alengka in disguise*

Kecak Blahkiuh, *photo collection of I Wayan Dibia*



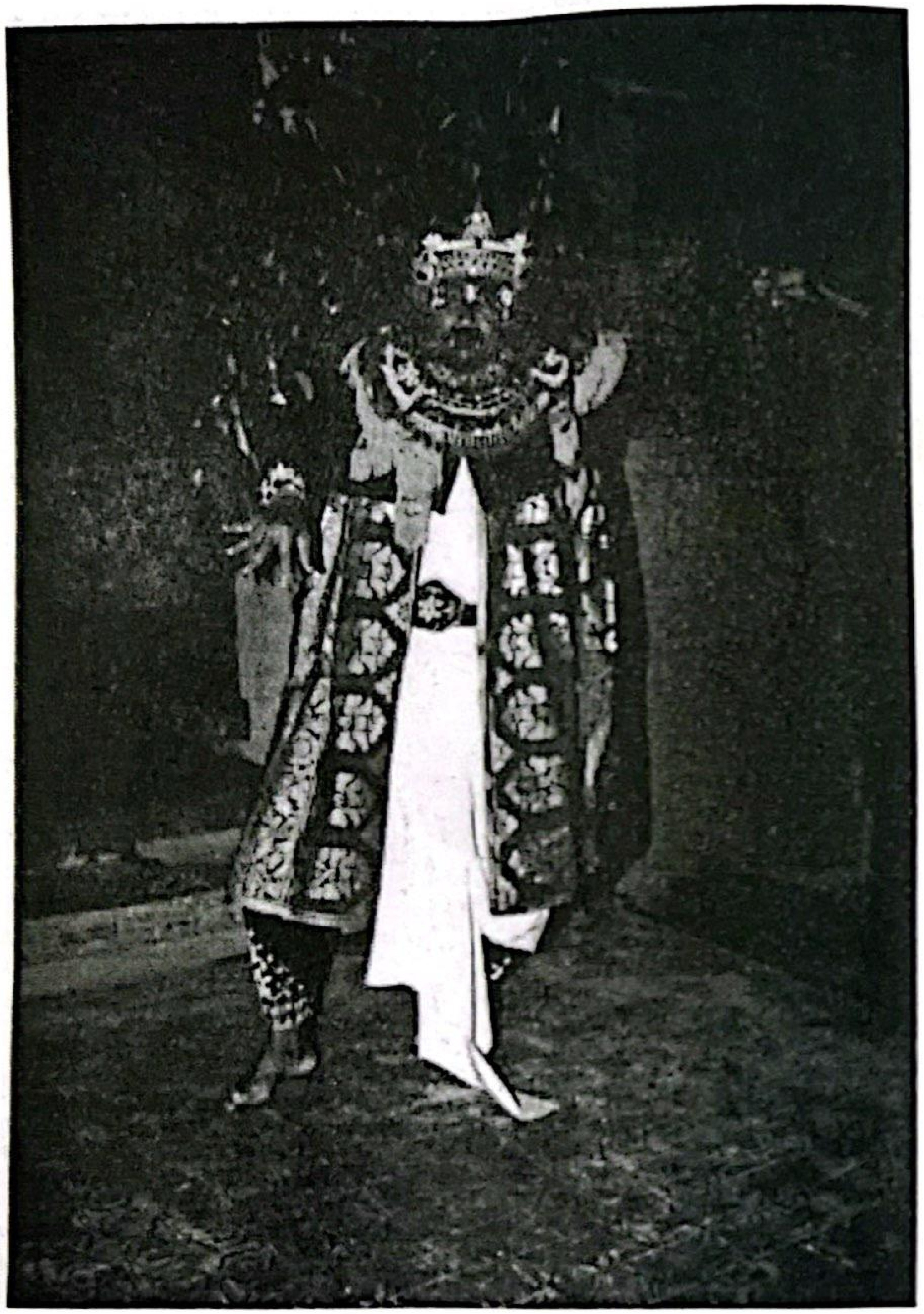
7. Rahwana ; The King of Alengka

Kecak Blahkiuh, *photo collection of I Wayan Dibia*



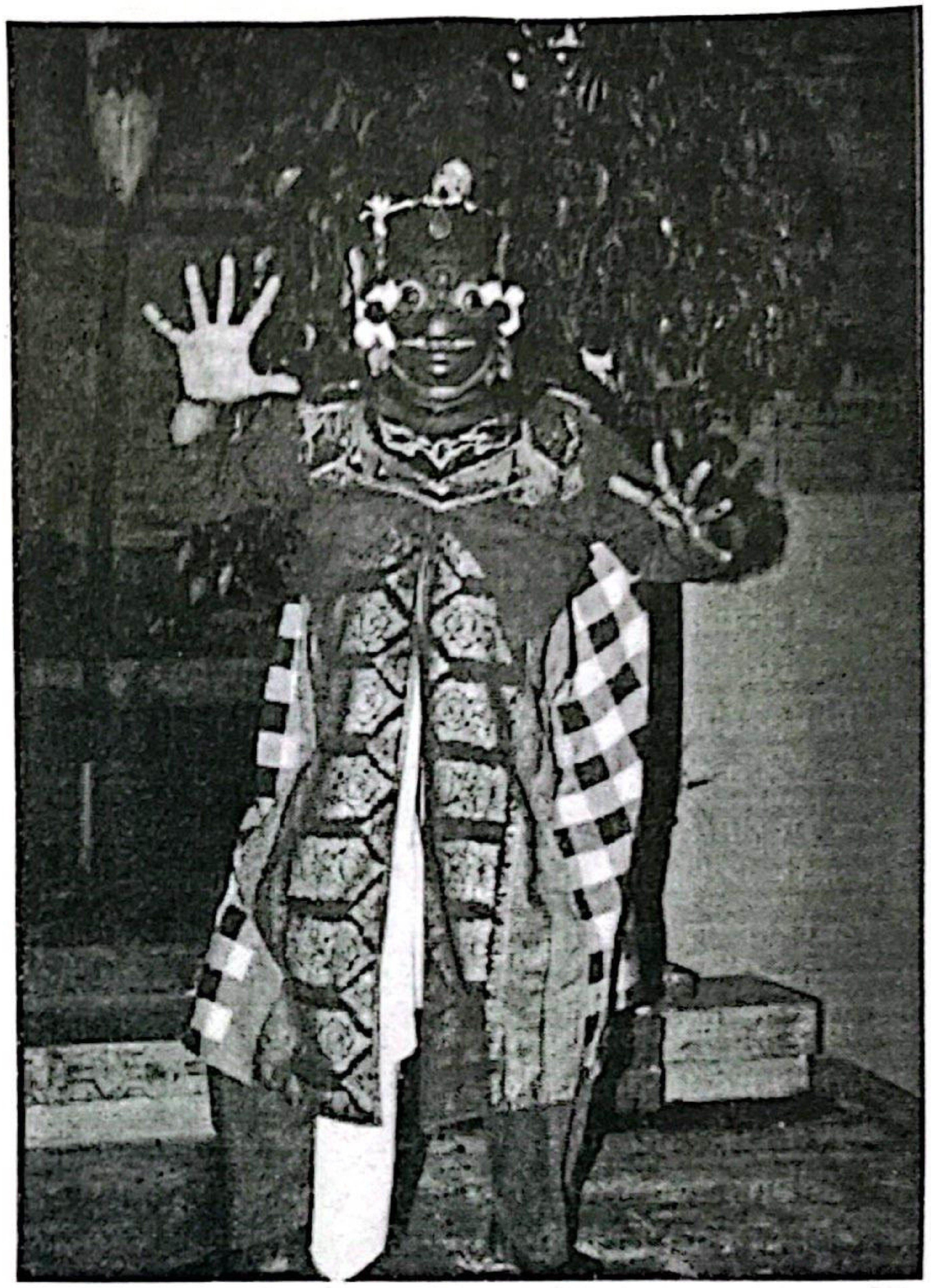
8. Trijata : Rahwana's niece

Kecak Blahkiuh, *photo collection of I Wayan Dibia*



9. Meganada : Rahwana's son

Kecak Blahkiuh, *photo collection of I Wayan Dibia*



10. Delem : Meganada's comic servant.

Kecak Blahkiuh, *photo collection of I Wayan Dibia*

11. Garuda: the mighty bird, messanger of God Visnu.
STSI Denpasar, *photo collection of I Wayan Dibia*

List of Scenes and Stage Actions

The Entrance **(Papeson)**
The Opening **(Pategak)**
The Enactment of the Story **(Lampahan)**

Act One:
Scene 1 : Rama and Sita
Golden Deer
Laksmana
Scene 2 : Rama and Golden Deer
Scene 3 : Sita and Laksmana
Rahwana
Scene 4 : Rahwana

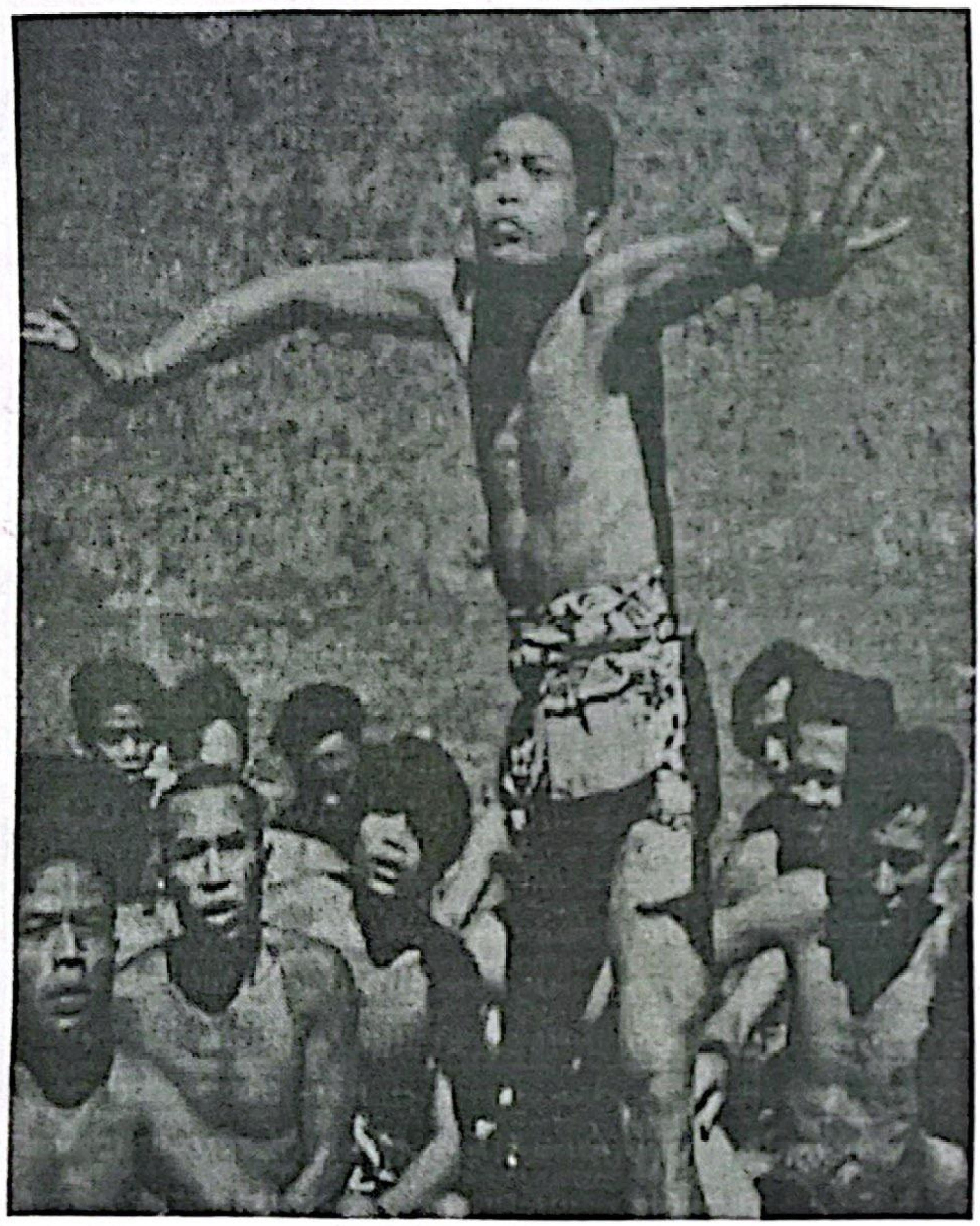
Act Two:
Scene 1 : Sita and Trijata
Scene 2 : Hanoman

Act Three:
Scene 1 : Rama, Laksmana, and Twalen
Scene 2 : Meganada and Delem
Scene 3 : Garuda

Act Four :
Scene 1 : Sugriwa and Twalen
Scene 2 : Meganada and Delem
Hanoman

Act Five :3
Scene 1 : Rama, Sita, Laksmana, Sugriwa, and
Hanoman

The Exit (**Panyuwud**).



Kumbakarna in Kecak Bedulu-Gianyar
Photo collections of I Wayan Limbak (Reproduced by Hartanto)

CHANGES AND INNOVATIONS IN KECAK

Within the course of the last sixty years, Kecak Ramayana has undergone several changes. While the essential elements of the production, the multi-layered interlocking, rhythmic voices, and the primal look and spirit have remained basically the same, many other aspects have been stimulated by other contemporary performance practices. These changes became especially evident after the mid 1960s, after the creation of the Ramayana Ballet or Sendratari Ramayana by I Wayan Beratha, a senior teacher of the **Sekolah Menengah Karawitan Indonesia (SMKI) Denpasar.**

Along the way a number of important productions representing dramatically new versions of Kecak took place in Bali. These modernized Kecak productions, which first appeared in 1970, had a significant impact on the development of the standard Kecak Ramayana, once again demonstrating that Kecak is a versatile performing art.

Changes and innovations in Kecak have always occurred as a result of the conscious efforts of artists in Bali to respond to the new esthetic demands brought by modern audiences and as a way to satisfy their own creative impulses. These changes may also be attributed to the local artists' perception of their work as an ongoing process rather than a finished product.

Changes in Kecak Ramayana

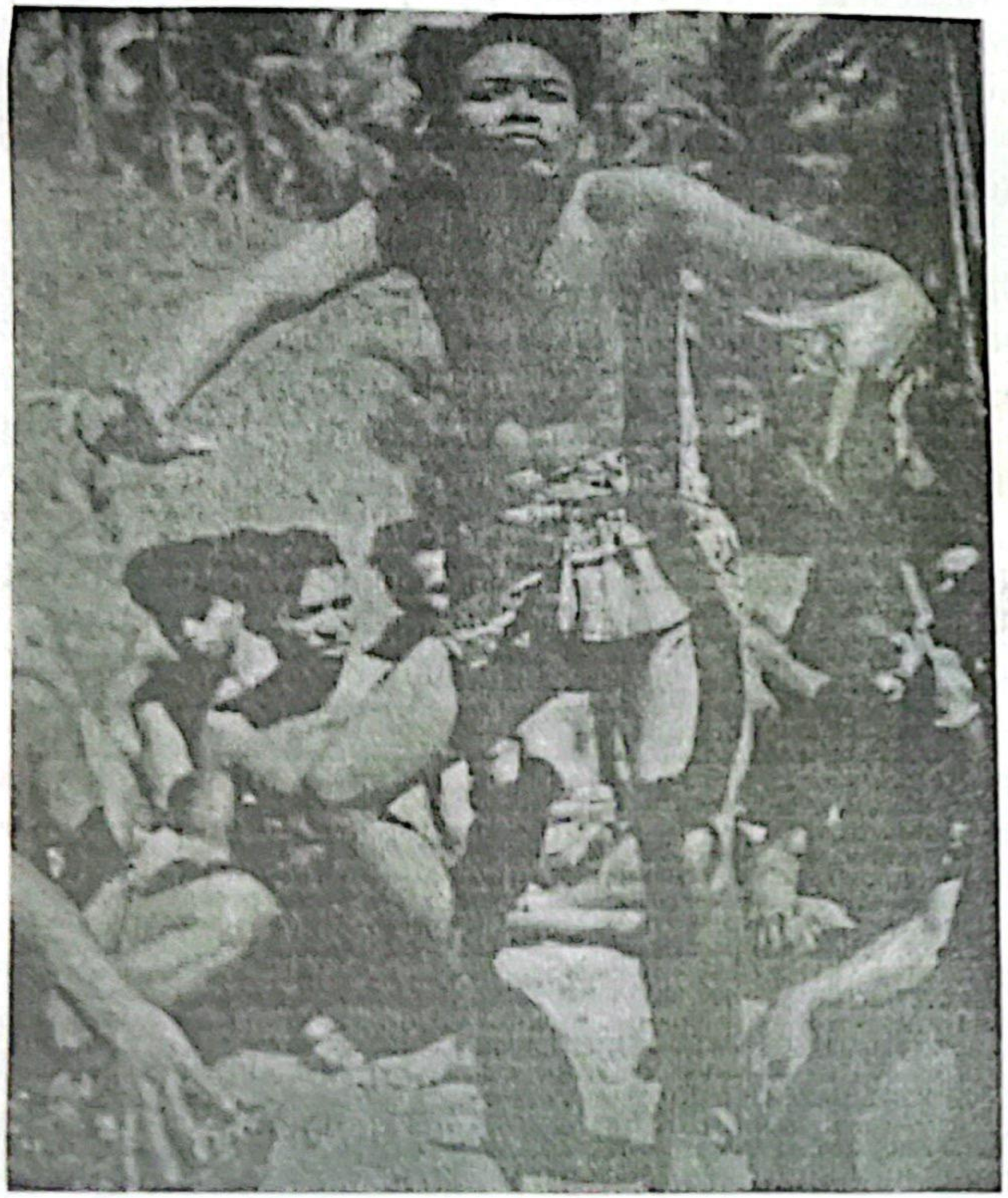
The older style of Kecak before 1967 was visually a simple and informal affair that presented a more loosely organized story. The essential changes that have occurred in Kecak up until the present day include: greater elaboration of the Kecak vocal forms, the introduction of new dramatic materials, and the use of more elaborate and colorful costumes. Although the older Kecak may have been a spontaneous expression of popular culture, today the Kecak has become a more formal and complex dramatic presentation.

Spontan

Early Kecak performances employed fewer, simpler, rhythmic patterns and sustained a slower tempo, but it featured a significant amount of irregular chanting in conjunction with other expressive and mysterious sounds. Contemporary Kecak performances feature much more complex vocal form utilizing almost all of the interlocking patterns (three, five, six, seven). The tempo of Kecak today is much faster than before and, although irregular chants are used, most of the melodic lines have been adopted from the Gamelan **Gong Kebyar**.

There also seems to be a diminishing role for the chorus in present day Kecak. Today the chorus mostly support the action on stage, whereas before the chorus was treated as one of the most important part of the Kecak and was given more time to be heard and appreciated by the audience.

The use of more elaborate and colorful costumes for the chorus and the principal characters signal another significant change in Kecak. As a form of village art supported by artist-farmers, for nearly three decades Kecak required only the simplest of costumes. The chorus members wore everyday loincloths along with whatever batik cloth they might have personally owned. There was no effort made to color coordinate what the chorus members wore, nor was there any attempt at creating a uniform costume for the whole chorus to wear. The principal characters also wore less elaborate costumes, and usually ended up borrowing part from formal ceremonial dress and dance costumes. Rahwana, for example, usually would just step out from the chorus, wearing much the same costume as everyone else. Beginning in the 1970s, however, Kecak began to employ more elaborate costumes. A standard uniform was set for the Kecak chorus and all the principal characters began to emulate the costumes from the popular **Ramayana Ballet** and the classical **Wayang Wong**. Along with this use of more elaborate costumes there has been greater specialization and differentiation between the role of the chorus and the role of the principal dancers. No longer do leading roles like Rahwana just emerge from the chorus.



Kumbakarna in Kecak Bedulu-Gianyar

Photo collections of I Wayan Limbak (Reproduced by Hartanto)

Rama, Sita and golden deer

Kecak Blahkiuh, *photo Collection of I Wayan Dibia*

The last major change in Kecak concerns the use of the narrative story. In the past the Ramayana scenes featured in the Kecak did not typically belong to a single part of the Ramayana epic. The action was more fragmentary and impressionistic, as the scenes did not attempt to tell the whole story of the Ramayana but rather to give a few excerpts. Very often significant characters such as the golden deer, or even Rama himself, might be omitted according to the conditions and resources of the performers. Nowadays, following the model established by the Ramayana Ballet, the story presented in Kecak is more complete. The distinctive style of the Ramayana Ballet has also had an influence on the kinds of music that are performed. Considering these changes, the Ramayana Ballet can be counted as one of the three most influential performance forms to effect Kecak production, next to **Sanghyang** and **Wayang Wong**. Despite the great change in the cultural environment of Bali, Kecak has continued to persevere. Kecak's continued success amongst all of these other popular art forms demonstrates the enduring appeal of this unique performance form.

Innovations in Kecak

Since 1970 a number of new versions of Kecak, along with some works that were derived from Kecak, have been produced in Bali. Some of the most noticeable innovation in these new Kecak productions includes the use of modern choreographic structure, more complex vocal chant patterns, new performance elements, and stories derived from different dramatic sources.

The secondary high school (SMP) "Tresna Yasa" from the village of Singapadu in Gianyar created a new Kecak in 1971. This production enacted a story from the early episode in the Ramayana epic, the **Ayodya Kandha**, called **"The Death of King Dasarata"**. Perhaps more significant was the use of the chorus to create different configurations on stage to represent a garden, forest, or a palace. This Kecak was choreographed by the author.

In 1972 Sardono W. Kusumo, a dancer-choreographer of Javanese origin, produced modern Kecak in cooperation with the people of Teges, Gianyar, creating "Cak Rina." In this production the chorus members stood, ran, formed a procession, split and reassembled to enhance the drama. The story they enacted was "Subali and Sugriwa" (from the **Kiskenda Kandha**), which told of the battle between the two monkey-king brothers from Kiskenda.

Photo Collections of I Ketut Rina

Sugriwa commanding his monkey troops in "Cak Rina" Teges Kangin.

In 1975 the author created another new version of Kecak involving the students and faculty of the Indonesian Dance Academy or ASTI Denpasar (now Indonesian State College of the Arts, STSI). Using the story of "Gugurnya Subali" **"The Death of Subali,"** this Kecak utilized about 150 men who were used to create a cave, trees, rock, wind and cloud according to the needs of the story.

Sugriwa and Dewi Tara in Kecak "Subali-Sugriwa"

STSI Denpasar,, *photo Collection of I Wayan Dibia*

A large Kecak chorus with over 500 men was produced in 1979. This new Kecak was the work of the author as a commission from the Regent of Badung to serve as a highlight at a formal ceremony celebrating a special award from the Indonesian Government. The story was from the Mahabhrata epic and told of **"Arjuna's Meditation"** or **Arjuna Tapa**.

At the 1981 Bali Art Festival the Waturenggong Dance Company of Denpasar presented a new version of Kecak in the Bali Art Center. This production told the story of **"Cupak Becomes King"** or **Cupak Dadi Ratu** which was derived from the Balinese *Cupak Grantang* poem. This production was also choreographed by the author, employing about 250 male chorus members.

In 1982 an experimental Kecak was performed outdoor on the beach. This production was produced by ASTI Denpasar for the Kuta Art Festival. This new Kecak resulted from the exploring of the beautiful sunset found at the famous Kuta Beach. The production involved about 250 performers, with some of the chorus actually floating in the water as they chanted. This production enacted a popular story from the Mahabharata, **Dewa Ruci**, in which Bhima (one of the Pandawa clan) undertakes a difficult journey to find the "water of eternal life" known as **tirta amerta**. This new Kecak was also choreographed by the author.

In 1990 Keith Terry from San Francisco, California, and the author collaborated on a cross-cultural production called "Body Tjak". This project was the result of a long process of collaboration between the artists (Dibia and Terry) by blending the essential elements (rhythmic patterns, sound, and movement) of American "body music" and Balinese Kecak. This production had 24 male and female performers (twelve from the U.S. and 12 from Bali). This new work was premiered in San Francisco at the Festival 2000 and subsequently toured to many cities in California and Bali. In this production the author presented what must have been the smallest Kecak chorus ever attempted, with only 12 male and female chanters performing nearly all rhythmic patterns in Kecak.

In 1993 a new form called "Kecak Barong" (which combined elements from both the Barong and the Kecak traditions) was produced at the Bali Art Center. Choreographed by the author, this production used 200 chorus men, two **barong kekets** and two **rangdas**, and was performed by the people of Blahkiuh Village of Badung, under the commission of the Department of Power and Energy (Perusahan Listrik Negara) Denpasar, for an international conference. The story performed was "**Sunda-Upasunda**" which is derived from the Mahabharata epic.

It is also important to mention the production of "Official Kecak" or **Kecak Pejabat** produced by the Provincial Government of Bali in 1993. Among the leading dancers of this production were Mr. Ida Bagus Oka, the Governor of Bali (Rahwana) and Mrs. Oka (Sita). A year later the office of the Badung Regency produced the "Officers' Wives Kecak" or **Kecak Dharma Wanita**. These productions, although infrequently performed, demonstrate a growing interest of Bali's elite and the highest government authorities in Kecak as a valuable recreation and esthetic experience.

Since the 1970s in the village of Bona it is possible to view the **Sanghyang Jaran** and the **Sanghyang Dedari** as tourist performances. These shows, advertised as a "fire dance," are condensed and modified versions of the sacred **Sanghyang** trance performances. The performance typically begins with a religious ceremony inside the village temple which is followed by performances of both **Sanghyang Dedari** and **Sanghyang Jaran** outside the temple. Today "fire dances" can be found outside Bona, in fact, and some Kecak groups have begun to feature **Sanghyang Dedari** and or **Sanghyang Jaran** dance at the end of their Ramayana performance.

Sugriwa in small kecak by STSI Denpasar.
photo Collection of Ketut Prasetya.

ARTISTS AND GROUPS

Kecak Masters and Trainers.

The flourishing of the dramatic Kecak Ramayana in Bali is due to the contributions of a number of masters and trainers. Among the leading figures are the following:

I Wayan Sentanu

I Wayan Sentanu, also known as Pekak Tanu, was born in 1921 in Bona village in Gianyar. He is one of the oldest Kecak masters and trainers, and perhaps he is the most instrumental Kecak trainer on the island. A son of a local Kecak performer, Pekak Tanu himself joined a Kecak group in his home village when he was twelve years old. Since 1957 he began to train Kecak groups in various villages in Gianyar, Badung, and Bangli districts. The highlight of his career as Kecak trainer was training a Kecak group in Jakarta to perform at the Presidential Palace.

I Nyoman Raun

I Nyoman Raun was born in Saba village, Gianyar in 1923. The son of a local Kecak performer, Raun learned Kecak at the age of fourteen. In 1956 he joined the Radio Station of the Republic of Indonesia, **Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI)** in Denpasar where he met a well-known Kecak master I Gusti Kompyang Gelas of Bona. For many years Raun was the chorus leader or **juru tarek Cak** for a number of Kecak groups he trained both in Gianyar and Badung districts.

Tjokorda Raka Tisnu

Tjokorda Raka Tisnu, also known as Tjok Tisnu, was born in Singapadu village, Gianyar in 1947 and started dancing at the age of ten. He attended the Indonesian Dance Academy (now STSI Denpasar) for his formal training and education in dance. In 1971 he joined the Kecak group of his home village Singapadu and played a leading role as Rahwana. He has participated in some major Kecak productions such as the experimental Kecak **"Dewa Ruci"** at Kuta Beach (1982), and Kecak Ramayana **"The Abduction of Sita"** by the Provincial Government of Bali (1993). He joined Kecak tours, by STSI Denpasar, to Australia (1986) and Okayama-Japan (1992), and in 1995 he was invited to train Kecak in Tokyo. At home Tjok Tisnu has trained a number of Kecak groups in the Singapadu area.

I Gusti Ngurah Putra

I Gusti Ngurah Putra, born in Bona (Blahbatuh) village, Gianyar in 1951, is one of the most prolific Kecak masters and trainers in Bali. He joined his home village Kecak group at the age of seventeen, first as a chorus member and later played the white monkey Hanoman, one of the leading roles on the Ramayana story. Within the past twenty years Putra has trained Kecak groups in almost all nine districts on the island of Bali. Among the important Kecak groups of which he is very proud are the Kecak group of Banjar Buni, Banjar Legian Kaja, and Bualu the villages of Badung District; Tojan, Kramas, Sampiang, and Ubud villages of Gianyar District; Timpag and Tanah Lot villages of Tabanan District; Kecak Demulih, Siladan, and Kintamani villages (Bangli District). In addition to these, Putra has taught Kecak in a number of High Schools in the Badung and Gianyar areas, and trained an "All Women" Kecak in 1995 in Badung District.

Ida Bagus Nyoman Mas

Ida Bagus Nyoman Mas was born in 1951 in Blahkiuh village, Badung District. For his formal training and education in the performing arts (music and dance) he attended the Indonesian Conservatory of Traditional Performing Arts (KOKAR), and STSI Denpasar where he learned Kecak by participating in some Kecak productions by the College. In 1990 he founded his own Kecak group in his home village (Blahkiuh). The group has won the higest recognition for both its artistic and performance quality. Ida Bagus Mas has participated in a number of major Kecak productions such as, the Kecak **"Arjuna Tapa"** (1979), the Kecak **"Sunda Upasunda"** (1993), and the Kecak "Bhima Suci" (1994). He taught Kecak at the University of Hawaii at Manoa (UHM) in 1995, and was the co-director of Kecak **"Hanoman as Messenger"** produced by UHM in 1995. In addition to these, he has trained Kecak groups in many places within the Badung region.

I Wayan Dompolan

I Wayan Dompolan was born in 1934 in Cemenggon village (Sukawati), Gianyar. A retired employee of the People's Bank of Indonesia, **Bank Rakyat Indonesia**, Mr. Dompolan was a member of the Kecak group of his home village, which has a long tradition of the sacred **Sanghyang Dedari**. He has taught Kecak in several places, and one of the group he is very proud of is Kecak "Eka Naya Sandhi" in Singapadu.

The Active Kecak Groups

Up until the 1980s the Office of Consultation and Development Council for Balinese Arts and Culture, Majelis Pertimbangan dan Pembinaan Kebudayaan (Listibiya), has awarded "Certificate of Art" (Pramana Patram Budaya) to 27 Kecak groups in Bali. While a number of Kecak groups have stop performing these days, several new groups have emerged. Currently there are about 25 Kecak groups which actively perform in the evening, from 06.30 P.M. to 07.15 P.M., for tourist visiting the island. Most of these groups can be found in the district of Gianyar (where the Kecak Ramayana was first innitiated in the 1930s), and Badung. Among the the important and the most active groups are the following:

1. Kecak "Tresna Jenggala" Ubud

The base of this group is Banjar Padangtegal, Ubud (Gianyar). The group was originally founded in 1955 and was trained by I Made Nesa of Peliatan village. This group, employing about 150 performers, chanters and dancers, regularly performs Kecak Ramayana and "fire dance" 2 to 3 days a week, at the Jaba Pura Kloncing, Padangtegal, Ubud.

2. Kecak "Chandra Bhuwana" Batubulan

This group is based in Banjar Sasih, Batubulan-Sukawati (Gianyar). The group is composed of 105 people who are members of the local village. The group was oroginally founded in the 1960s and was reactivated in 1990. The group was originally trained by I Nyoman Raun of Saba village, and currently the group actively performs Kecak Ramayana and "fire dance", 5 times a week, in Batubulan.

3. Kecak "Catur Lila Asrama" Batubulan

The home base of this Kecak group is Banjar Pegambangan, Batubulan (Sukawati) village of Gianyar. Founded in 1971, this group is composed of the local village members and was trained by three local Kecak trainers: I Puji, I Suda, and I Rawin. Composed of 95 members, the group currently performs Kecak Ramayana and "fire dance" 5 times a week in its home village at the "Barong Sahadewa" or "Puri Batubulan" stage.

4. Kecak "Semara Madya" Peliatan

This is an old Kecak group which was originally founded in 1966 trained by i Wayan Sentanu of Bona village. Composed of 200 people, selected mostly from the community members of the Banjar Tengah, Peliatan, this group actively performs Kecak Ramayana upon request at the Jaba Puri Peliatan.

5. Kecak "Eka Naya Sandhi" Singapadu

This Kecak group, with 125 members, is based in Banjar Kebon, Singapadu (Sukawati) village of Gianyar. Founded in 1971, the group is composed of local village members and was trained by I Wayan Dompolan from Cemenggon village of Gianyar. Since its inception this group have actively performed Kecak Ramayana in various hotels and as well as in its home village based upon request.

6. Kecak "Dharma Putra Laksana" Blangsinga

This group was founded in 1972 by the people of Blangsinga village of Blahbatuh (Gianyar). The group, with 100 members, was trained by I Nyoman Silih of the same village, and they actively perform Kecak Ramayana at different places in Denpasar, Sanur, and Nusa Dua.

7. Kecak "Gunung Jati" Teges Kangin

Among many Kecak groups on the island, the Kecak "Gunung Jati" of Teges Kanginan, Peliatan (Ubud) village of Gianyar, also known as "Cak Rina," is the only group which performs modern style of Kecak featuring **"Subali-Sugriwa"** story of the Ramayana epic. This group was founded in 1972 by Sardono W. Kusumo through his collaboration with the villagers of Teges Kangin with a number of Balinese artists such as Nyoman Kakul, Ketut Rinda, Wayan Rindi, Tapa Sudana, and I Made Netra. Holding about 100 of mixed members of children and adults, this group performs Kecak in many hotels, private residences, and art galleries in Sanur, Kuta, Ubud, and Candidasa, depending upon request. Most frequently this group stages its art in its home village in a stage located just in front of the **Pura Khayangan Tiga Desa Adat** Teges.

8. Kecak " Guna Budaya " Gulingan

The home base of this Kecak group is Banjar Gulingan Tengah, (Mengwi) village of Badung. The group was founded in 1973 by Sang Made Muka by inviting Kecak trainers (I Wayan Darta and Gusti Ngurah Putra) from the village of Bona. Holding 127 members, this group performs Kecak Ramayana based on request, both in its home village and outside.

9. Kecak "Purana Cakti Jaya Laksana" Angantaka

This group, with 85 members, was founded in 1975 by I Wayan Mudra and trained by I Gusti Made Arka assisted by Ni Nyoman Serni. The base of the group is Banjar Kekeran-Angantaka, (Abiansemal) village of Badung, and it actively performs Kecak Ramayana twice a week at the "Uma Dewi" stage at Jalan Waribang in Denpasar.

10. Kecak "Dharma Sandhi Budaya" Bualu

The group is based in Banjar Penyarikan, Bualu village (Badung). Holding 115 members, the group was founded in 1979 and trained by I Made Bina of Banjar Bengkel, Sumerta. The group actively performs Kecak Ramayana mainly at the Galleria Super-Market, Nusa Dua, twice a week.

11. Kecak "Ganda Sari" Bona

This is the last generation of the old Kecak groups found in the village of Bona (the Kecak "Ganda Wisma" established in 1935 and the Kecak "Bona Sari" founded in 1962). This group was established in 1986 under the direction of I Gusti Ngurah Putra, I Gusti Bagus Susana, and I Made Sija, by selecting the members of the two previous Kecak groups. Nubering 140 chanters and dancers, the home base of this group is Banjar Bona Kelod, Blahbatuh (Gianyar). This group actively performs Kecak Ramayana and "fire dance" 3-4 times a week mostly in its home village. Sometimes the group also performs at hotels in Sanur and Nusa Dua.

12. Kecak Pangembungan Batubulan

This Kecak group, involving 70 members, was founded in 1989. The group was trained by I Gusti Kompyang Gelas of Bona village of Gianyar, and the group actively performs Kecak Ramayana for the public, based on request, in several places in Denpasar, Sanur, Kuta, and Nusa Dua.

13. Kecak "Puspita Jaya" Blahkiuh

This group, founded in 1990, is composed of 100 members (dancers and chanters). They are the people of Banjar Ulapan, Blahkiuh-Abiansemal (Badung). The group was founded and trained by Ida Bagus Nyoman Mas with Anak Agung Putra Susilawati, and Cokorda Istri Budawati.

This group performs Kecak Ramayana regularly 5 days a week at the "Uma Dewi" and "Catur Eka Budi" stage at Jalan Waribang, Kesiman (Denpasar).

14. Kecak "Apuan Sari" Singapadu.

This group with about 90 members is based in Banjar Apuan, Singapadu (Gianyar). Founded in 1992, this young group is composed of obligated members of the local village hamlet and was trained by Tjokorda Raka Tisnu of Singapadu (Gianyar). This group has a regular performance schedule, 3 times a week in the Sanur and Nusa Dua, and occasionally at its home village.

15. Kecak "Pemaksan Sanding" Cemenggon

This Kecak group was founded in 1992 by the members of the Pemaksan Sanding congregation of Cemenggon, Celuk. The chorus was trained by local artists I Nyoman Roja and I Ketut Tirta, and the dancers by I Nyoman Cerita from Singapadu. Numbering 87 chanters and dancers, this group regularly performs Kecak Ramayana 3 times a week in Nusa Dua, Sanur, and other stages in Denpasar.

16. Kecak "Gita Kumara Jaya" Blahkiuh.

The base of this group is Banjar Kembang Sari, Blahkiuh-Abiansemal (Badung). The group, holding 115 members, was founded and trained by Ida Bagus Nyoman Mas in 1993 together with his wife Anak Agung Istri Putra Susilawati and Cokorda Istri Budawati. This group actively performs Kecak Ramayana 4 times a week at the "Catur Eka Budi" and "Uma Dewi" stage at Jalan Waribang, Kesiman (Denpasar).

17. Kecak "Banjar Batugaing" Braban

Presently this is the only Kecak group in Tabanan area which

actively performs in Tanah Lot beach. The group was founded in 1993 by I Wayan Sukandia, with his younger brother I Made Bogoartha and I Ketut Rina of Teges Gianyar. Holding about 150 chanters and dancers, who are the members of the Banjar Batugaing, Braban village of Kediri, this group regularly performs Kecak Ramayana, twice a week at the Dewi Shinta Hotel at Tanah Lot, Tabanan.

18. Kecak "Desa Adat" Ubud.

This is a relatively young group for it was founded in 1994 under the direction of I Made Sija of Bona village. Numbering 150 people selected from the community members of Ubud Kaja village, the group actively performs Kecak Ramayana at the Pura Dalem in Ubud 3 times a week.

19. Kecak "Gaing" Singapadu.

This group is based in Banjar Apuan, Singapadu (Gianyar). Numbering about 75 chanters, mostly volunteers from the local community, this is a new group that was founded in 1995 under the direction of Tjokorda Raka Tisnu of Singapadu village. The group continues to actively perform Kecak Ramayana at several hotels in Sanur and Nusa Dua, as well as in its home village about 3-4 times a week.

20. Kecak "Sila Budaya" Batubulan.

This is perhaps the youngest Kecak group for it was established around the mid 1996. Holding about 100 members, including chanters and actor-dancers, this group is own by the Sila Budaya Foundation of Batubulan-Sukawati (Gianyar) who also stages daily "Barong and Kris Dance". This Kecak group was trained by I Made Darta, I Ketut Santra, and I Nyoman Muka of Singapadu, and it performs Kecak Ramayana with "fire dance" (featuring **Sanghyang Dadari** and **Sanghyang Jaran**) at the "Sila Budaya" stage in Batubulan.

Hanoman present Rama's ring to Sita
Kecak Blahkiuh, *photo collection of I Wayan Dibia*

CONCLUSION

Cak or Kecak is a unique dramatic form embodying artistic elements of the ancient and modern Balinese culture. Cak integrates dance and drama, but ultimately the artistic beauty of the art form lies in its intricatre vocal chanting. The complex and multi-layered sound of "cak cak cak" chanted in various rhythmic patterns is at once the essence and soul of Kecak.

Known to the Western world as the "Monkey Dance," Cak is one of Bali's most popular performing art forms for tourists. This dramatic form was invented in the 1930s originally by integrating elements of the sacred **Sanghyang** dance and the classical **Wayang Wong** dance-drama. Two key villages in the development of Kecak are Bedulu and Bona of the Gianyar District.

During the course of sixty-five years, Kecak has undergone many changes due to the popularity of the modern Balinese Ramayana Ballet. Meanwhile, creative choreographers in Bali continue producing modern Kecak with Ramayana, Mahabharata, and other stories.

Today Cak continues to be the "star" of the touristic performing art forms in Bali. Its primitive look and the magic of its performance become a memorable part of any visitor's stay on the island of Bali.

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DR. I WAYAN DIBIA, Born in Singap[illegible] village of Gianyar in 1948, I Wayan Dibia is a distinguished performer of classical Balinese da[illegible] choreo-grapher and scholar specializing in Bal[illegible] performing arts. Mr. Dibia received a SST (Se[illegible] Sarjana Tari) degree from The National Dan[illegible] Academy of Indonesia (ASTI) Yogyakarta i[illegible] a Master of Arts degree in dance (1984) and a Ph.[illegible] i[illegible]isci-plinary Studies in Southeas[illegible] Per-[illegible]g Arts (1992) from University of California, Los Angeles under the grant of the Asian Cu[illegible] Council and the Fulbright-Hays.

Mr. Dibia learned Kec[illegible] Conservatorium of Indonesian Performing Arts, Konservatori Kar[illegible] Indo-nesia (KOKAR). He is considered [illegible] many as a leading figure in [illegible] new ideas to Kecak. In 1970 he choreographed the new Kecak "Da[illegible] Gugur" ([illegible] Death of King Da[illegible], for which he used the chorus to [illegible] various configurations such a[illegible]e gate, forest, or mountain, to reve[illegible] dramatic scene of the given pla[illegible] 1976 he choreographed the m[illegible] "[illegible]griwa", the Kecak "Arjuna Tapa" featuring 600 male chor[illegible] and the contemporary Kecak "[illegible]wa Ruci" performed at Kuta Beach in [illegible] 300 male chorus in 1982. He [illegible]led Kecak groups to West G[illegible]any Hong [illegible]), Australia ([illegible]), and has trained or given [illegible]k work[illegible] in C[illegible]for[illegible], Colorado, and London. In 1990, he worked with [illegible]ith [illegible] produce "Body Tjak" by utilizing elements of Balinese Kecak and body [illegible] In 1995, to complete his two-mon[illegible] residence at the University of Ha[illegible] Manoa (UHM), with Ida Bagus Nyo[illegible] Mas, Mr. Dibia created th[illegible] "Hanoman as Messenger."

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